

ONE-ACT
PLAYS



CLARK AND
COOK

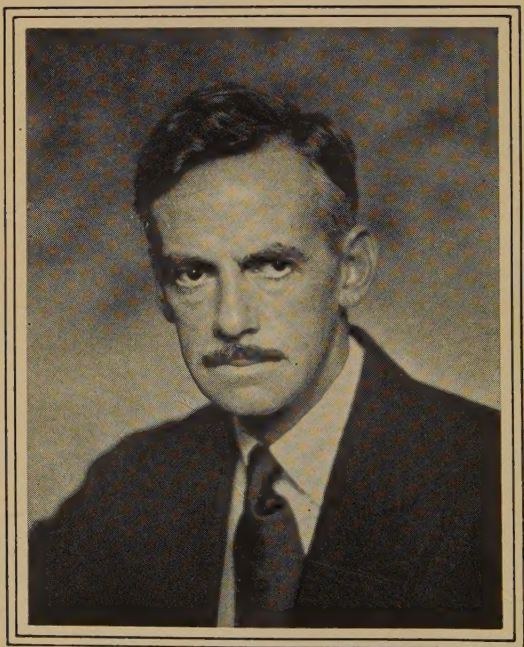


Photo by Pinchot
EUGENE O'NEILL

ONE-ACT PLAYS

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PREFACE

It has not been the intention of the editors of this book merely to bring out another volume of one-act plays. Rather, the aim has been to make a contribution that will have a distinct American flavor; that will illustrate characters and modes of living in various parts of the United States. Young American playwrights have been selected purposely in order to encourage the student and show him that much has been accomplished in the field of drama by youthful writers.

It is felt that the more a student knows concerning the life of the playwright, the more that student will appreciate what he reads. The biographies preceding each play are so written as to establish some sort of contact between the dramatist and the pupil. The questions which follow each play are well within the students' range of thought.

Copyright mention is made of each play, and a notice appears explaining to whom the director should apply for acting rights. To the publishers and authors who have so willingly given permission to reprint their plays, the editors are grateful. In particular, thanks are due Mr. Homer K. Underwood, headmaster of Bulkeley School, and the members of the class of 1931 at Bulkeley School for their efforts in carrying out the great amount of work imposed upon them.

THE EDITORS

NOTE ON ROYALTY FEES

All the plays in this book are fully protected by federal copyright and may not be acted before audiences without the written permission of the authorized agent or publisher. In connection with each play here will be found a note indicating the agent to whom application must be made for such permission.

Several agents have agreed to allow copyright plays to be acted by drama classes without the payment of a royalty fee, but only when this is a regular part of the class work. No outsiders are permitted, even if no admission fee is charged. However, it is advisable in any event to communicate with the agent and explain the circumstances.

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FOR THE STUDENT

When I went to school, and that was not so very long ago, I was bored a good deal of the time. Not that my teachers were especially inefficient or I particularly stupid: they did their best, and I — well, I did what most students do, tried to get through the course by working as little as was absolutely necessary.

What was the trouble? First, I think, it was because for many years a mistaken theory of education had been allowed to take root and spread among far too many schools, a theory that may be summed up as an unexpressed demand that every subject taught should be either so dull or so difficult as to reduce the student's pleasure and interest to a minimum. There was, in every English course I ever took or heard about, a dreadful thing called "prescribed reading." There is something about that word "prescribed" that wasn't right; it sounded like what a strict physician orders in the case of a serious illness. How was it that every book on the prescribed lists given to me has left a bad taste in my mouth? To this day I cannot read *Lycidas* without a shudder, or *Comus*, or *Macbeth*; and as for Burke *On Conciliation*, I shan't ever allow a copy of it in my house. It was not that these works are either dull or useless, but they are hardly the things most calculated to stimulate a love of literature in young people.

One day a young man, just graduated from the university, came to teach our English class. The regular instructor was ill, or had been transferred to another class — I am not sure which. The newcomer took his place, and for a few minutes the class was apathetic as usual, expecting the teacher to begin by repeating phrases from textbooks about the classical allusions in Milton, and to end by requiring us to memorize by next Monday the "quality of mercy" speech.

Instead, he opened up a very profane-looking green book

with a modern-style paper label on it, and without comment began reading as follows:

"In a dentist's operating room on a fine August morning in 1896."

That didn't sound a bit like Burke or Shakespeare. And note the date, 1896. The year I am writing about is 1905. For all I ever learned in my earlier English courses, the writing of literature had ceased somewhere about 1860.

What our new English instructor had done was to read the first act of a play called *You Never Can Tell*. The title alone made us all sit up; it sounded jaunty and promised something amusing.

You who are familiar with the comedies of Bernard Shaw will not be able to realize the astonishing effect produced upon that English class that heard for the first time the refreshing lines of *You Never Can Tell*. Here was something written by a living — a decidedly living — man; a challenge, a stimulating appeal to the intelligence of young people.

A new world was opened to us; and we were suddenly aware that literature and the drama were not dead subjects concerned with dead issues, like Cicero's orations against a man whose conspiracy and punishment meant and could mean nothing to us.

How our new teacher managed to smuggle the dangerous and disreputable Shaw into the classroom and dared to contaminate our tender minds with the Irishman's revolutionary ideas, I don't know. Maybe the whole thing was kept a dark secret? But no matter, for as the years went by, this same teacher was able to make the study of contemporary plays an important and credited school subject, and what is more, to maintain the interest of his students. He also made play production and playwriting part of the curriculum, and later still carried his work into other schools and colleges.

The man I refer to is Theodore B. Hinekley, whose work as editor of *The Drama* and as lecturer and teacher, and whose disinterested efforts to encourage the intelligent study of dramatic literature are widely known and appreciated.

Since that morning in 1905 when he opened up to me the realm of the contemporary theater, the situation in our schools has undergone a profound change. The educational world at last understands to a certain extent that the first duty of every teacher is to interest his students, because we cannot learn unless we really care about the thing that is taught us. Whatever gave me pleasure in school and college has remained with me; whatever bored me I have forgotten or could never bring myself to study alone at a later time. I believe that where there is no pleasure there is no learning, and I am inclined to think that the pleasure we experience in enjoying good literature and drama, in the pursuit of science or in the reading of history, is not only the means of securing education, but is in a way education itself.

Yet in spite of the enormous strides we have made in nearly all our schools, there persists a viewpoint here and there that the study of literature and drama should be confined to the work of "standard" writers, preferably those who have been accepted by the more conservative critics as outstanding representatives of their day and country. There is also a tendency to avoid studying the work of the younger Americans, as being so close to us that we cannot yet determine whether it is acceptable as literature or not.

The purpose of the editors of this book is to call to your attention precisely the newer dramatists of this country; some of the plays here are certainly not imperishable masterpieces, and some cannot be considered as works of high art: they are all, however, serious efforts of the younger men and women of our day to exhibit and interpret the life about us. The collection consists of living examples of present-time American playwrights in the one-act form. These should be read with the idea that they are the work for the most part of young men and women some of whom are not very much older than you, who are teaching school or striving to make ends meet by writing in city and village, or by lecturing, or, in the case of three or four of them, by following professions.

What interests us about the plays of these writers quite as much as that they are recent, is the fact that they are all

American. Each in his own way is strictly representative of his country, and most of them have succeeded in producing plays that belong clearly to a certain state, county, or even village.

This is something that should appeal to all of us: we can all watch the process of creation as it is actually taking place in our midst, today.

For my part, I find it thrilling to watch the work of every new native playwright of promise, as he tries, with greater or less success, to shape into plays the material that lies closest to him. The American drama of today is just as important as the drama of any other country, if not more so, and there is no good reason why we should not as a nation develop more and even better playwrights than we have already developed.

The one-acters here brought together may be used in several ways. First, they are to be read; and remember (no matter what other critics may tell you) that a good play is just as good in printed form as it is in a theater. Next, you may produce them (provided, of course, that you pay the stipulated royalty fee, in order that the writer may pay his butcher and feed his babies), and in so doing enjoy acting in them and bringing into relief their characters and background; and finally, you may study them in connection with your own efforts to write plays.

Mr. Cook has worked with these plays, produced and analyzed them with his students and tested their acting possibilities in the classroom, and his notes on them are therefore especially valuable. But I would not urge you to copy these plays, or to try to reproduce their plots or language. Look at them as more or less successful efforts to record effectively something of the life and background familiar to their authors.

You cannot hope to write well about anything you don't know at first hand. If you have the power of seeing and understanding your sisters and your cousins and your aunts and your neighbors, you have at least the makings of a playwright in you; for it is the playwright's business to show us human beings in their most characteristic moments. Each of you

knows enough about human beings to have something that is worth telling about them.

These few words of advice may possibly prove helpful to you; I hope they may, yet I should like you to bear in mind that no matter how much these plays may improve your technique, or enable you to act or direct, or add to your knowledge of contemporary American drama, they were written not for your material advancement, nor to provide examination questions, nor even to add to your store of general culture, but to entertain and amuse you, to quicken in you a sense of kinship with your fellow-beings.

BARRETT H. CLARK

FOR THE TEACHER

Mr. Clark's words to the students have had a pronounced effect upon me as a teacher of high school English. Probably most teachers are aware of the situation as Mr. Clark presents it, but even so they are doing not enough to correct the existing conditions. As my work in the classroom goes on from day to day, I believe that each lesson is successful only to the extent to which it is interesting to the student. I am not going to advocate omission of the literature of the past, but let us find more time for the literature of the present. By no means should the plays of Shakespeare be taken out of English courses, but too often we accept the Shakespearian standard to the exclusion of other important literary productions. A few years ago, my own classes were engaged for two or three months of the school year in the study of *The Merchant of Venice*, and a modern play was required for outside reading. In the past year, I have cut in half the time of classroom work usually spent on Shakespeare and have brought the outside reading into the classroom. The result of this change proved highly gratifying. From a selection of one hundred modern one-act plays, each student read a required number, and made a report to the class. It might here be said that in nearly every case the report as given to the class aroused interest sufficient to cause the play to be read by the other students on their own initiative. It is this spirit of voluntary enjoyment that we wish to introduce into our classrooms.

During this experiment with one hundred plays, certain ones stood out as being especially adaptable to the acting abilities of high school students; certain others offered many valuable class discussion topics. Careful analysis of these plays disclosed the fact that on the whole they differed from the plays usually included in textbooks on this subject. With one or two exceptions the plays proved to be the works of

young American writers, presenting varied and vivid pictures of contemporaneous American life. Out of this experiment grew the idea for a textbook containing these plays which had been used most successfully. The idea proved to be similar to a plan of Mr. Clark's whereby many young American playwrights could be introduced to students.

The most promising material from all of my English divisions was formed into a group to test the plays selected. It was here that the questions were evolved which follow each play. Finally, from the trials held by this group, the twelve plays which make up this book were decided upon.

The first play to win the unanimous appeal of the class was E. P. Conkle's *Sparkin'*. Because it should immediately catch the interest of all students, it comes first in this collection. Long before the students finish reading *Sparkin'*, the thought is sure to come to their minds that there is going to be some very good reading in this book. Therefore one problem, that of holding the interest of a class, has solved itself. *Sparkin'* is a wholesome and refreshing comedy. A rustic romance enacted in the kitchen, with the innocent sweetness of country children, forms the background against which Granny Painsberry shines as a gem of originality. An incorrigible old woman, she dominates the entire scene, while her shrewd and sharp remarks afford keen enjoyment.

At Bulkeley School the parts were all played by boys. Careful attention was given to the details of the stage setting and pains taken not to overdo the comedy in dress or action. The result was a very effective entertainment.

Kathleen Norris and Dan Totheroh have combined their respective talents in the second play, *The Kelly Kid*. Here we find a group of three women condemning a young rascal of the neighborhood; then, with quick Irish sympathy, joining to shield him against his pursuers, the police. A cast of Irish boys at Bulkeley presented this play with good results. The piece will be successful in production only to the degree in which an Irish atmosphere is achieved. If this can not be conveyed through the authentic use of brogue, care must be taken to make the actions of the three women convincing.

It is also essential that the audience be deceived regarding the exit of the Kelly Kid in the guise of Mrs. Cahill. Otherwise the dénouement will fail.

Lynn Riggs has led an eventful life, and for some reason it seems natural to associate *Knives from Syria* with its author. In this little play, he shows us the desire of Rhodie for an existence more colorful than that of farmer's wife — her wistful longing to escape from the drab life which is about to engulf her. A peddler with his stock of silks, laces, and gleaming knives from Syria offers her the escape for which she has longed. If her new life is to be, perhaps, a precarious one, we are glad to see Rhodie bid farewell to the farm. The play offers no difficulty in the way of presentation, while the suspense which the dramatist develops is most effective.

The prominence which is Eugene O'Neill's as the leading American dramatist makes his inclusion in a book of this nature necessary. From the many one-act plays which he has written, *Ile* seems the best suited to present to students. It is the story of a captain's wife who had insisted upon accompanying her husband on a voyage to the Far North. Months of the gray monotony bring her to the verge of insanity, but her husband presses on in his quest for the valuable whale oil. The climax is reached when, with the whales sighted ahead and his wife's condition demanding that he turn back, the captain makes his decision. The only difficulty confronting the successful production of the play by students is the casting of the part of Annie. If the part seems to be too difficult for the talent available, then the play is better left for class discussion, from which much benefit can be derived.

Saved, by John William Rogers, is a play well suited to the needs of an all-female cast. It is easily produced and provides satisfactory entertainment. Miss Emily, a spinster entirely under the dominance of her elder sister Minnie, suddenly suspects that her sister may not have been infallible in her judgment and management of both their lives. With this realization, Miss Emily finds the courage to aid her niece in securing the happiness which Emily has been denied.

Just as *Saved* is included for the benefit of the all-female cast, *The Resignation of Bill Snyder* will meet the requirements of boys. Once the atmosphere of intense cold is rightly sensed, pupils will find no difficulty in entering into the spirit of the production.

The No 'Count Boy by Paul Green will afford profitable study for all English classes. Not since Eugene O'Neill has an American playwright shown such promise as has this gifted author. A careful analysis of *The No 'Count Boy* will reveal the truth of this statement. To a simple situation and to ordinary Negro characters the dramatist brings a rare understanding and appreciation, which, together with his peculiar beauty of expression and sense of poetry, lend to the lines a quality of lasting charm. The perfection of the dialect brings the very sound of the words to the ears of the reader. If this play is attempted for presentation, the matter of dialect should be given serious consideration. Unless this feature can be perfected, the play should not be attempted by amateurs.

The Organ, by Kenyon Nicholson and G. Edward Pendray, presents another phase of rural life, this time a picture of a family whose attempts to establish a homestead has failed. All of their ambitions and hopes have come to an end with their eviction from their property. The man, Henry, is a figure of frustration; but his wife, Myra, is a stronger spirit. She lacks Henry's helpless resignation, yet finds herself crushed beneath this last hard blow. But her spirit flames again as the moment comes for the sale of her organ, which has been to her the symbol of all that she has missed in life and the thing on which are based her hopes for the future of her boy.

As a contrast to the types of rural plays which precede it comes *Bargains in Cathay* by Rachel Field. This bright comedy is one which will appeal to amateur performers and is sure to please its audiences. A clever girl in a bookshop employs all her tact and charm to entice chance customers to purchase a book of her lover's poems. Her success with her final customer provides a surprise ending to a very satisfactory sketch. This play is good reading material as well as a pleasant entertainment when produced.

No collection of plays by young Americans would be complete without the sort of play of which *Money* is a striking example. Here Mr. Gold has depicted the Jewish immigrant establishing contact with the America that first comes to his attention. *Money* is typically American, and Mr. Gold has succeeded here in throwing light on one of our most complex sociological problems.

The plays of Babette Hughes are always unusual and replete with ingenious situations, and *Backstage* is no exception. This is a play that will appeal to young amateur actors, and because it furnishes excellent entertainment, it is included in this volume. The physical training teacher can readily drill a chorus to meet the requirements of the opening scene, and the players will at once fall into the spirit of the rest of the play. Mrs. Hughes has been kind enough to permit the inclusion of *Backstage* in this collection, where it appears in print for the first time.

The final play appearing in this volume is *The Song of Solomon* by Mark O'Dea. Mr. O'Dea treats a subject which investigation has made familiar to him — that is, woman's life on the farms. Though the author admits that the time has now passed when conditions of the nature he describes are common, it is well to be reminded from time to time of the hardships that have been endured by farm women.

A difficulty in producing the play becomes evident if the director tries to carry out the ending as it is written. The dramatist writes the conclusion as he sees it, but it is expecting too much of an amateur to act this difficult rôle. In presentation, the scene must be modified to come within the scope of ordinary talent; yet it is necessary to show that Mrs. Sykes has succumbed to the long-threatened mental collapse.

These twelve one-act plays, collected from the lists of the leading playwrights of our own day, illustrate what is taking place about us in actual life. It is hoped that the study of the plays will provide enjoyment both for the teacher and the pupil.

It might be suggested that any three plays in the book

would make a satisfactory evening's entertainment. For the sake of variety, *Sparkin'*, *Ile*, and *Bargains in Cathay* might be used effectively; if a similarity of theme is desired, *Knives from Syria*, *The No 'Count Boy*, and *The Song of Solomon* would do very well. As royalty costs are from five to ten dollars only for each play, the charge will not exceed that which is ordinarily paid for one three-act play. And there is the additional desirable feature that more students are given the opportunity to take part in stage work.

THOMAS R. COOK

August, 1929

A WORD ON AMERICAN DRAMA

Until the early decades of the eighteenth century no theater existed in this country, and it was not until after 1750 that any regular professional company of actors came into being. If you will look at the histories of drama recently published by Mr. Montrose J. Moses and Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn, you will see that playwrights during the Colonial Period of our history had no very easy time of it; also that there were no playwrights of outstanding ability. It was not until after the Revolution that native writers set about their business with any very serious notion of telling their audiences about American scenes and American people. Royal Tyler wrote one comedy that is historically important, but *The Contrast* is at best a rather weak theater piece.

To William Dunlap, historian, manager, and dramatist, we owe a considerable debt for his intelligent if not highly inspired plays, a large number of which were produced during the early years of the nineteenth century. Yet most of these were adaptations of popular foreign pieces. John Howard Payne, who relied almost entirely on foreign themes, is another writer who holds a place of importance in the development of native drama.

Consistently, if slowly, American playwrights sought to bring to the theater a wider variety of native scenes, until by the middle of the last century we find the Irish-born Dion Boucicault writing plays — such as *The Octoroon*, *Belle Lamar*, and *The Streets of New York* — that are as distinctively American as anything that had been written up to that time.

Bronson Howard, whose career covered the last three decades of the century, is rightly considered one of the founders of our modern American drama. His plays, especially *Shenandoah*, *The Banker's Daughter*, and *Aristocracy*, were widely popular, and added considerably to our gallery of native American portraits. Writing at about the same time

was James A. Herne, whose *Shore Acres* was a genial if occasionally melodramatic picture of New England Yankees. Toward the close of the last century Edward Harrigan, David Belasco, Augustus Thomas, and Clyde Fitch all produced work which, despite its unevenness, may be characterized as in some way significant.

During the early years of the twentieth century a number of dramatists were attempting to bring new ideas and new methods of writing into the theater, chief among them Percy MacKaye. William Vaughn Moody and Eugene Walter are also deserving a high position among what may be called the forerunners of our contemporary drama.

It was, however, only during the last ten years that our country has produced a large number of genuine dramatists who were consistently writing first-rate plays about native scenes and characters. Eugene O'Neill, who was the first of these, has made a conspicuous place for himself as one of the leading world dramatists of our age. George Kelly, Sidney Howard, Paul Green, and Philip Barry are among his most distinguished contemporaries.

It may at some future time be possible to determine the chief causes for the appearance in our midst of so many "adult-minded" dramatists. But for the present we must be content simply to recognize their ability and watch with the closest interest their development as artists.

It is worth our while to consider for a moment the function of the one-act play in our contemporary theater. Though one-acters are now used almost entirely in vaudeville and by amateurs, many of the new American playwrights — O'Neill, Green, Kelly, Riggs — learned their jobs by writing short plays. Yet even these men, after succeeding with full-length dramas, admit that the one-acter is susceptible of development at its best into an independent art-form. It would have been difficult to produce the same effect in long plays that is felt in such perfect works as *Ile* and *The No 'Count Boy*.



A CARICATURE OF E. P. CONKLE

SPARKIN' ¹

By E. P. Conkle

CHARACTERS

SUSAN HANNA

LESSIE HANNA

GRANNY PAINSBERRY

ORRY SPARKS

SCENE. *Evening at TUDE HANNA'S farm home. The room is the kitchen. On the right wall is the kitchen range, with a teakettle stewing and simmering. In front of the stove, with her stocking feet stuck into the oven, sits GRANNY PAINSBERRY. She has a shawl over her shoulders and sits all scrootched up. She shivers at times, and sticks her hands out to warm them.*

In the center of the room is a dining table, covered with a white oilcloth. There are victuals in dishes and uncovered. In the middle is a lamp. LESSIE HANNA, a shy and pretty little girl, is ironing some things. One end of her ironing board rests on the table; the other end lies on the back of a chair. Throughout the play she runs to the stove and changes her irons, the hot for the cold. She irons away busily and adroitly, looking up now and then suspiciously toward the upper door left.

In the rear of the room, SUSAN HANNA, TUDE'S wife, is working at a kitchen cabinet mixing out bread.

¹ Copyright 1928, by Samuel French, in the volume *Crick Bottom Plays*. All rights reserved. For permission to act this play, apply to Samuel French, 25 West Forty-Fifth Street, New York.

There is a door in the rear wall right; and there are two in the left wall, both identical, and very close together. There is a straight-back chair between the two doors. At the rise of the curtain the women are working.

GRANNY *chews and spits into the woodbox. After a spell of silence, GRANNY speaks.*

GRANNY. Is Tude gone to bed, Susy?

SUSAN. Why, yes, ma. Didn't you hear him say he was a goin' to bed?

GRANNY. Ef I'd a heerd him I wudn't a asted you.

[*pause*]

Whut'd Tude go to bed fer s' soon a'ready?

SUSAN. He said he war kind-a tired, ma. He's been a shuckin' corn on that north forty an' et's perty rough in them hills. Et wears a person clean out.

[*silence*]

GRANNY. What time is et?

SUSAN. Whut time is et, Lessie? I cain't see with-outen my spec's.

LESSIE. It's a quarter to eight, mom.

GRANNY. What'd she say?

SUSAN. She said et war a quarter to eight.

GRANNY. Well, why don't she speak plainer-like? No wonder Lessie ain't got no fellers. A pusson cain't hear nothin' she says. Not nothin'!

LESSIE. I don't want no fellers.

SUSAN. Lessie ain't a thinkin' about the fellers, air you, Lessie?

LESSIE. No. [*She looks toward the door again. Then she lowers her head.*]

GRANNY. What say?

SUSAN. Lessie hain't thinkin' 'bout no fellers.

GRANNY. Listen to th' wind blowin'! Hain't thinkin' 'bout no fellers, ain't she? Well . . . ef she haint',

you betterd taik her inter Doc Spellzer an' have her 'zamed. Thur must be somethin' wrong somewhurs about her.

SUSAN. Ma! What air you a-talkin' about annyways?

GRANNY. You heerd me th' fust time, Susy. You know well 'nough whut I'm a talkin' about. Uhhhhhh

. . .

[pause]

GRANNY. You a-arnin' that white calicy dress-a mine, Lessie?

LESSIE. I guess I am, Granny.

GRANNY. What say?

LESSIE. I guess so, Granny.

GRANNY. You guess so? Don't you know so? Don't you ever know nothin', Lessie? A person'd think you was plumb dumb. Maybe you air. I don't know. A pusson never cain hear nothin' you say. You're jest like'n your dead gran'pap Lute Painsberry. He never did know nothin', neither. Leastwise, not more'n th' law wud allow.

LESSIE. I'm a-arnin' your dress, Granny. Lands-a-goodness!

GRANNY. That's right! Begin a-swearin' at me! Well, see you don't scorch no hole inter et!

SUSAN. A person'd think you war old enough to know better'n to go to dances, ma. You're too old t' be doin' such things.

GRANNY. I hain't too old to do nothin'. Nobody hain't who don't think so! I'm a goin' to Hank Wagnerses barn dance tomorry night/ef I have t' put on a pair-a gumboots an' wade. Nobody cain't talk me outen et. So shet up. Hang that dress up in th' closet thur b'hint ye.

LESSIE. That's what I was a-aimin' t' do, Granny.
[She holds the dress up before her grandmother.]

LESSIE. See. Ain't it perty, Granny?

GRANNY. It'll do . . . cainsiderin' who arned et.

LESSIE. Let's see how you're a goin' to look . . .

GRANNY. Git away with yer lollygaggin' 'round me, will you? You act like you'd never'd a seen me dressed up!

LESSIE. You look like a perty old rosebud, Granny!
[*She lays the dress on the old lady's huddled form.*]

GRANNY. I *am* perty old. But I hain't no rosebud. I know I hain't no rosebud. An' you know I hain't no rosebud. You jest want to git my money when I'm gone. You're jest like all th' rest-a them all!

LESSIE. Aw, Granny . . . I don't want your money.
[*She stoops and kisses the old lady. The latter spits and sputters.*]

GRANNY. Git away with yer lollygaggin' 'round me, will you? I never cud tolerate no lollygaggin' 'round! Lute usta be all th' time a lollygaggin' round. He didn't care who he lollygagged with, neither.

SUSAN. Ma! You're talkin' about poor pa thataway?

GRANNY. He allus sayed as how he wanted t' go to hell, 'cause thur's where a person'll find all th' wayward women-folks.

SUSAN. Ma! You're talkin' thataway before Lessie?

LESSIE. Don't pay no attention to me. She can't hurt me none.

SUSAN. Lessie!

[*LESSIE goes to hang the dress in the closet.*]

GRANNY. I reckon Lessie'll be a-settin' her cap fer that new hired hand Cornie Youngses got.

LESSIE. Granny!

GRANNY. He don't look t' me like he 'mounted to powder an' lead t' blow him up with. One-a them slow-pokey fellers. They don't never get nowheres in this-a

world. You got to be up-an'-comin' to amount to much around here. I'll give it to your gran'pap. He war shore up-an'-comin'. 'Specially whenever he seed a woman. I had no complaint t' make 'bout him a-bein' a live one.

LESSIE. That feller over to Young's is a nice feller.

GRANNY. Oh. You been inspectin' him, have you? Oh.

LESSIE. Well . . . he is!

GRANNY. Susy.

SUSAN. What, ma?

GRANNY. Put another stick-a cordwood inter th' fyar. My feet is a freezin' off of me. That there slippery ellum is too wet. Et don't burn good when et's wet. Tell Tude t' scair up some-a that jack oak that's on th' bottom-a th' pile.

SUSAN. [*fixing the fire*] It don't seem none too cold in here for me. Does it to you, Lessie?

LESSIE. I'm about burnin' up.

GRANNY. Well, et hain't no heat out-a this here stove's a-burnin' you up. Ef you're a-burnin' up, et must be with curiosity er somethin'.

SUSAN. We're a-workin', ma.

GRANNY. What you a-workin' at?

SUSAN. I'm a-mixin' out my bread. Th' starter hain't been right th' last two times.

GRANNY. You don't put enough taters inter your tater water.

SUSAN. Et hain't that, ma.

GRANNY. Don't you go a tellin' me what ain't, an' what is. Ef you want to know what — [*There is a heavy step on the porch. All the women turn abruptly towards the upper left door.*] Who's that a prowlin' around here this time-a th' night? [*There is a stomping and scraping of feet.*] Comin' around time a person's

gittin' ready fer their bed. [*There is a heavy knock on the door like the banging of a mailed fist.*]

LESSIE. Oh! [*The women turn to her.*]

SUSAN. Who is et, Lessie?

LESSIE. It's . . . him!

GRANNY. Who's *him*?

LESSIE. Him!

SUSAN. Lessie, who is et?

LESSIE. It's Orry Sparks.

SUSAN. Lessie . . . what's Orry Sparks doin' comin' over here?

LESSIE. T' see about somethin', I reckon.

GRANNY. Who'd she say et war?

SUSAN. She said et war that new feller over to Youngses.

GRANNY. Oh. I was a-wonderin' what she was a-wearin' them new slippers an' sox t'night fer. So she's a-shinin' around fer a man, is she? I ain't got no use for that young feller over . . .

[*The knock comes again*]

LESSIE. Mom!

SUSAN. What? *is the*

LESSIE. He's . . . out there, mom!

SUSAN. Well?

GRANNY. Don't be so green. Go an' let him in. He won't never amount to nothin'. He . . .

LESSIE. Mom . . . I don't know what to *do*!

[*SUSAN goes to the door and opens it.*]

GRANNY. Mildew!

[*LESSIE stands back of the ironing board nervous and blushing. GRANNY scrootches up in her shawl. ORRY SPARKS slides in. He is a big, husky fellow. He is bashful and stands with his cap in his hand. His eyes are on LESSIE. Otherwise he doesn't know what to do or say.*]

SUSAN. Howdy do, Mister Sparks. Nice evenin' out, aint' et?

ORRY. Howdy do, Missus Hanna. Why, yeh, kinda.

SUSAN. Lessie, here's Mister Sparks.

LESSIE. [*turning and stammering*] Oh. I didn't know you was here. Howdy do. Let me have your cap.

ORRY. Howdy, Lessie. You arnin' some clo'es?

LESSIE. I'm tryin' to.

GRANNY. What does he want, Susy? Is somebody sick over to th' Youngseses? I reckon that little Betty-Sall has throwed another-a her cat fits, an' . . .

ORRY. Th' Youngses is all right, fer as I know. I jest . . . [*He casts his eyes LESSIE-ward.*] . . . kinda thought I'd drop in a spell to see you folks. I never been over to see you yet.

SUSAN. I'm right glad you come over, Mister Sparks. Have you ever met up with Granny, here? She's my ma.

ORRY. Oh. She's th' nice old lady comes over visitin' Missus Young, ain't she?

GRANNY. What's he a-sayin'?

SUSAN. He said as how you was a nice old lady, ma.

GRANNY. Who sayed that?

SUSAN. Him.

[GRANNY turns and looks squarely at ORRY.]

GRANNY. Oh. [*She turns back. Pause.*] Well . . . [*pause*] Maybe I hain't so nice as I look, young feller. [*She feels in her pocket.*] Have a chaw-a t'baccer? [*ORRY is wide-eyed.*]

LESSIE. Granny . . . maybe he don't . . .

GRANNY. In my day all th' real fellers chawed t'baccer an' drunk strong lickier.

ORRY. Well. I don't us'ally chew t'baccer. But sometimes I do. I'm a real feller, I am. I'll . . . I'll try a chaw . . . [*He grabs off the plug. He looks to*

LESSIE *to see if she is watching. He bites off the chunk and returns the plug. GRANNY looks over her shoulder birdlike.*] . . . ef et kills me!

SUSAN. Jest set down annywheres you cain find a chair, Mister Sparks. Looks like Lessie's got 'em all filled up with clo'es.

ORRY. Dcn't mind about me. I cain set on th' floor. Here's a chair over here. [*He sits on the chair between the two doors. There are clothes on the back of it.*]

LESSIE. [*going about her ironing*] I'm sorry I cain't ast you into th' front room, but we ain't got our heatin' stove up in there yet.

ORRY. Aw, that's all right. I ain't usta no parlor rooms, noway. I don't feel at home sittin' on a sofy. Do you?

LESSIE. It's 'cordin' who I'm sittin' with.

ORRY. Aw.

GRANNY. What you ca'culate t' do around here t'night, young feller?

SUSAN. Ma . . . it's time you was in bed, ain't et?

GRANNY. What say?

SUSAN. I sayed it was time you was in bed. Your bed's ready.

GRANNY. What ef et is? Cain't I set up ef I want to? There's one night ever' year I set up to nigh onto nine o'clock. I think this year, this is et. Poke up th' fyar, Susy.

SUSAN. Ma, you'll ketch your death a cold settin' up here.

GRANNY. Whose death is et, annyway? Why should you keer? You all got your eye on my money when I do die. They ain't nobody 'round here cain make me go t' bed ef I don't want to. Ef they is, I'd like t' see th' color-a her or his petticoats.

[GRANNY *scrootches up.*]

SUSAN. Don't pay no 'tention to ma, Mister Sparks. She's gettin' old.

ORRY. 'Tain't th' old ladies worries me much, Missus Hanna. Et's . . . [*He blushes. He looks toward LESSIE.*] . . . th' young ones.

[*LESSIE blushes.*]

LESSIE. Don't let them worry you none, Mister Sparks. They ain't worth worryin' none over.

ORRY. I reckon . . . you're a talkin' through your hat, Lessie.

[*LESSIE smiles and lowers her head. She irons.*]

GRANNY. Ef you air a aimin' t' git inter th' good graces-a this fambly, you want t' treat me nice, young feller. I got all th' say around this fambly. What I says, goes. What I don't say, ain't wuth sayin.'

ORRY. I . . . I brung you over a sack of candy . . . Lessie. Got et into Martin'ses store this afternoon. Et hain't much, but et's somethin' to chaw on. Save you chawin' th' rag. [*ORRY hands LESSIE the candy. She opens the sack and looks into it.*]

LESSIE. Oh. It's chocolate drops, isn't it?

ORRY. He'p yourse'f, and give some to th' folks. [*He arises to spit. He looks at both the doors. He decides on the downstage one, opens it, and spits out. He closes it and sits. LESSIE has taken a piece of candy out to eat.*]

LESSIE. Here, mom. Mister Sparks brung us some . . .

ORRY. I brung 'em fer you, Lessie, private.

LESSIE. Oh.

ORRY. But your folks cain eat on 'em if you say so. They're kinda hard an' don't amount to nothin'. I reckon they been in th' store since Norah's Ark.

[*SUSAN takes one, LESSIE goes to the old lady.*]

LESSIE. Here, Granny. [*She holds the sack open for GRANNY to take one.*]

GRANNY. What is et?

LESSIE. Chocolate drops.

GRANNY. What?

LESSIE. Chocolate drops.

GRANNY. Choclit draps?

LESSIE. Yes.

GRANNY. Oh. [*She takes the whole bag.* LESSIE stands speechless.] Thank ye.

[LESSIE is about to protest.]

ORRY. Shshshsh. Let her have 'em. Don't rile her up none.

GRANNY. Whur'd you git choclit draps at?

LESSIE. Mister Sparks brung 'em.

GRANNY. Oh. [*She turns and casts a suspicious eye towards ORRY.*] They hain't so bad. [*She samples another one.*] I tasted better. [*She chews it.*] Yit . . . they ain't so bad. [*She takes another.*] How'd you know I like choclit draps, young feller?

ORRY. I . . . didn't.

[GRANNY scrootches up over her bag of candy and munches one after another. SUSAN goes about her business at the cabinet.]

ORRY. I didn't ca'culate t' stay very long. Guess maybe I orta be goin' on back home. Me and Cornie's goin' to cut fodder t'morrow on th' crick bottom. Liable to frost anny night now.

LESSIE. You don't need t' be a runnin' off home yet, Mister Sparks. You ain't only just come over.

ORRY. I know I ain't been here very long. But I just thought I'd just drop in a bit to . . . to see you. An' say . . . you wouldn't mind a-callin' me jest Orry, would you? Nobody never called me Mister Sparks much, an' ha'f th' time when a person calls me that, I don't know who they're talkin' to. Orry ain't much of a name, but I reckon I hain't so much, neither.

LESSIE. I got an uncle by the name of Orry, too. He's kind-of silly-like.

ORRY. Ah . . . yeh. [*He drops his head.* LESSIE *irons.* SUSAN *putters around.* GRANNY *nibbles.* ORRY *lifts his head.*] What you doin'? arnin'?

LESSIE. I'm arnin' out some things fer Sunday.

ORRY. Oh. [*He gets up and spits out the door again.* LESSIE *looks at* SUSAN. SUSAN *looks at* LESSIE.] Shore dark out t' night. Must-a clouded up since I come in.

GRANNY. Hain't a cloud in th' sky as I cain see. [*They all look toward* GRANNY. *She munches.* ORRY *closes the door and sits down.*] You arnin' that new calicy dress-a mine, Lessie?

LESSIE. It's all arned and hung up, Granny.

GRANNY. What?

LESSIE. Yes.

GRANNY. Well, don't git sassy. I heerd you th' fust time. [*pause*] Susy.

SUSAN. Yes, ma. [*going to* GRANNY]

GRANNY. These choelit draps shore hits th' spot. You folks don't never git me no choelit draps. That young feller ain't so bad. What's he a-doin' now?

SUSAN. Shshsh. He's a talkin' to Lessie.

GRANNY. What's he a-talkin' 'bout?

SUSAN. About cuttin' fodder, last I heard.

GRANNY. Fodder? Oh, shucks! [*She scrootches and nibbles.* SUSAN *casts a glance at* ORRY *and* LESSIE, *smiles, and leaves by the rear door.*]

ORRY. I usta he'p my ma arn. When I had a ma.

LESSIE. Ain't you got no ma no more?

ORRY. Nope. She went an' died. I ain't got no one t' look after me no more. That's why I'm like I am. I ain't got no one to look after me.

LESSIE. Aw.

ORRY. I been kinda on th' lookout fer someone t' look after me. You . . . know.

LESSIE. Who you ca'culate you'll git, Orry?

ORRY. Gosh durn . . . I don't know. But . . .
[*lowering his head and peeking at her from the corner of his eyes*] . . . I got my eye on some one.

[*She looks up from her work. She catches his glance. She lowers her head and blushes.*]

LESSIE. Oh.

[*There is an awkward pause. Then ORRY breaks it.*]

ORRY. Lessie . . . cud I he'p you arn a bit? [*He gets up.*]

LESSIE. I reckon you cud ef you was a mind to, Orry. But Granny wudn't like et.

ORRY. Why not?

LESSIE. Cause she don't like t' see men-folks doin' th' women-folks' work.

ORRY. [*sitting down*] Oh. Well. I guess I better not do it then. She's got a lot-a power around this house, ain't she? [*He pulls out his handkerchief and blows his nose very, very audibly.*]

LESSIE. She ain't got so much as she thinks she has. Us folks all 'umors her.

ORRY. I bet her husban' had to mind his P's and Q's, didn't he?

[*ORRY puts his handkerchief into his pocket. Not noticing, he gets it mixed up with an ironed piece on the chair. The next few minutes he spends stuffing a garment — it is a lady's garment, — into his pocket. He is talking and doesn't notice it.*]

LESSIE. Gran'pa Painsberry never went to school. He never knowed no more'n th' law'll allow.

ORRY. You're perty smart, though, ain't you, Lessie?

LESSIE. O, not very. But I cain read quite a bit.

ORRY. Gosh darn, I wisht I cud read more. I don't have much time to read or nothin'. I never had many

books. I . . . [LESSIE *has caught sight of ORRY stuffing the garment into his hip pocket. She doesn't know what to say. She smiles.*] . . . I never been to school, much. But when I git a little money ahead . . . Whut you . . . grinnin' at, Lessie? [*He stops.*]

LESSIE. Oh. I was jest a-grinnin' at myse'f.

ORRY. I was only a-puttin' my handkerchief away, Lessie.

LESSIE. I didn't mean no harm, Orry.

ORRY. [*looking toward GRANNY*] Don't your folks never go to bed?

LESSIE. She's jest stayin' up 'cause you're here.

ORRY. I hain't much t' set up for.

LESSIE. No one ever comes in, much. Specially in the evenings. It gets kinda lonesome . . . for me . . . around here.

ORRY. I git kinda lonesome over to Youngses, too. They're all right. But I ain't nothin' but a hired man. They ain't no one there fer me t' talk to.

LESSIE. Us folks'ud like t' have you come over ever' now an' then.

ORRY. [*shyly*] That's whut I ca'culated on doin'. [*He grins.*]

LESSIE. Aw.

ORRY. It'd be kinda cold out t' taik a walk, wouldn't et?

LESSIE. It's perty cold out.

ORRY. Yeh. Still . . . et hain't *very* cold out. Do you ca'culate you cud go a-buggy-ridin' with me some time next summer, Lessie?

LESSIE. I reckon I cud ef th' weather wa'n't too bad. Of course . . . bein's you was to ast me to.

ORRY. I'm a-astin' you to now, Lessie.

LESSIE. Oh. Why . . . [*pause*] I'd . . . kinda like to, Orry. I never been buggy-ridin' with no boy . . . yet.

ORRY. I never neither.

LESSIE. I heard tell et's awful nice, though.

ORRY. I heard tell th' same thing. I'd like t' see fer myse'f, though. A person cain't tell nothin' from hear-say. [*He gets up and opens the door to spit out.*] Shore is dark out. Don't see a solitary star. [*LESSIE laughs to herself, but says nothing. He closes the door and sits down again.*] Well . . . [*Gets out his watch and winds it.*] . . . I reckon I orta be a moseyin' on home.

LESSIE. Don't be in no hurry.

ORRY. Don't think I have been, Lessie. When I come, I didn't ca'culate t' stay this long. I thought maybe you'd run me offn th' place.

LESSIE. Aw. You know I wouldn't run you offn th' place, Orry. You jest come on over when you git lonesome an' want to.

ORRY. Thanks, Lessie. I'll r'member that. I like t' stick around here. You folks is all so homely.

LESSIE. Homely?

ORRY. I mean . . . so kinda home-like.

LESSIE. [*low*] Oh. I . . . guess . . . that's 'cause we like you, Orry.

ORRY. [*blushing*] Aw, Lessie! Gosh darn!

GRANNY. [*turning her head*] You hain't very fast t' do business, air you, young feller?

ORRY. [*perking up his head*] Ah . . .

GRANNY. I heard ever' word you been a-sayin'. I cain see you're perty sweet on Lessie. Them choclit draps you brung me is first rate. Th' folks 'round here don't give me nothin' to chew on but t'baccер. I guess you hain't so bad. You ain't got much spunk, though. A feller's got to have spunk t' git on in this world.

ORRY. Ag'in I gits all riled up, a person'd never know how much spunk I got in me! Nobody knows how much spunk I got!

GRANNY. I'm a-goin' to poke off t' bed. Oh, Susy. Susy!

LESSIE. Mom's gone to bed already, Granny.

GRANNY. Well . . . why didn't she tell me she was a-goin' t' bed?

[GRANNY gets up from her chair. She holds the sack of candy close to her.]

GRANNY. Come yur, young feller.

ORRY. What you want?

GRANNY. [eyeing him closely] Lessie's a right nice little girl. But you got a good voice. You got good eyes. I reckon you ain't so bad.

ORRY. I'm perty good. Leastwise . . . I always try to be.

GRANNY. Them choclits shore filled me up right. Jest drap in anny night t' see Lessie. I likes peppamint draps, too. Peppamint draps is good fer th' stomick t' settle et. They're a kind of a physic, too, they say.

LESSIE. Granny!

GRANNY. [scornfully] What's wrong with you? [She passes LESSIE and starts for the lower door left.]

LESSIE. What you goin' to do, Granny?

GRANNY. I'm a goin' to show this yur young feller my bran' new white calicy dress.

ORRY. But . . . but . . . [He doesn't understand why she goes to the door downstage. To LESSIE.]

ORRY. But . . . her dress ain't outdoors, is et?

LESSIE. It's in the closet.

[GRANNY opens the door and goes in. ORRY stands dumbfounded. LESSIE breaks out laughing.]

ORRY. But . . . Lessie! What've I been a doin'?

LESSIE. You been a spittin' into th' closet, Orry!

ORRY. Aw. [His jaw drops ten degrees. LESSIE has great fun. GRANNY comes out with the dress. She holds it before her spread out. It is spattered with tobacco

juice. *She hasn't seen that yet. ORRY is paralyzed when he discovers it. LESSIE stares.*]

GRANNY. They all aroun' here think I'm dead an' gone a'ready. I'm a goin' t' fool 'em a trip or two. They's a barn dance over to Hank Wagnerses t'morry, an' I'm a goin' over t' show 'em all how t' cut th' pigeon's wing. This ol' chicken . . . [*She sees the two standing speechless. She views them over her spectacles. Then she looks down at the dress. Immediately she becomes alive.*]

GRANNY. Lessie . . . is them flyspecks on my bran' new white calicy dress? [*She hurries to the table and lays the dress on it to examine it.*]

ORRY. I . . . I guess I . . . better'd be goin' . . . home, Lessie.

GRANNY. T'baccер spit! [*She smells and examines.*] T'baccер spit! [*She frets and stews.*] T'baccер spit on my bran new calicy dress! [*She turns furiously.*] Les-sie! You . . . you . . . [*She spies ORRY's looks. He is about ready to break out crying.*]

ORRY. I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . .

GRANNY. You been a spittin' all over my dress, ain't you? You're a fine one, hain't you? Th' best thing you cain do is t' hit fer home as fast as you cain, an' never step foot onto this forty ag'in as long's I live! Th' idea-a you a-comin' into a person's house an' spittin' all over his bran new calicy dress! You're a nice one, ain't you? Et won't come out, neither. Nothing'll take t'baccер spit out! I've tried many's-th'-time t' warsh t'baccер spit out-a Lute's underpants. An' et won't warsh out no way! Hain't you a nice feller to come a-sparkin' a gal an' hain't got no more manners about you as to spit all over th' house thisaway! Look at th' floor in there! Pity me! [*She stoops to examine.*]

ORRY. I . . . I . . . I guess I better'd go on . . .

home, Lessie. I done enough mischief fer one night. An' I wanted to be so nice!

GRANNY. Yes. I guess you'd better'd! I'm a-goin' to tell Missus Young all about this! She orta know th' kind-a feller you air. Most like you been a spittin' in th' butter, an' spittin' down into th' cistern, an' . . . spittin' . . .

ORRY. [*to LESSIE*] I guess I . . . shore made a . . . mess-a things tonight . . . didn't I, Lessie?

LESSIE. Don't feel bad, Orry. 'Twa'nt your fault.

ORRY. My pa always sayed I was a blockhead. Now I know I am.

LESSIE. No you ain't, Orry. You ain't neither!

GRANNY. [*raising her head from the dress which she frets over*] Well . . . what you stickin' around fer? You done your *do*. You shore done a plenty, too. [*She holds out the dress.*] Hain't that a nice-lookin' spectacle after you gone an' messed all over et?

ORRY. I'll . . . buy you another'n.

GRANNY. I'd like t' know how you'll buy me another'n? You ain't got a second paar a pants to your name, let alone buyin' me a new calico dress!

ORRY. I . . . I know . . . et.

GRANNY. Well. [*She wads the dress up and puts it under her arm.*]

ORRY. [*to Lessie*] I'm awful sorry I . . . went an' done that. I guess I hadn't . . . orta come over . . . but I . . . you know . . .

LESSIE. You don't need to be sorry, Orry.

ORRY. I . . . I guess I . . . ah . . . [*He turns abruptly and takes a few steps.*] . . . good-by, Lessie.

LESSIE. Orry . . . what you a goin' t' do?

ORRY. I'm a goin' home . . . maybe. An' . . . maybe I ain't. [*He starts out the wrong door; becomes confused; goes to the other one.*]

GRANNY. [*mumbling*] A perty sight, ain't et? A perty sight t' b'hold! I'd like t' know how a person cain ever . . . [*She grumbles and starts for the rear door.*]

ORRY. [*turning at the door*] Good . . . good . . .

LESSIE. Orry . . . please don't go. Perty please!

ORRY. I'm goin'. An' you mayn't never see me ag'in, Lessie! [*He lunges out and slams the door after him.*]

LESSIE. Granny . . . Granny . . . looky what you've gone an' done!

GRANNY. Looky what he went an' done!

LESSIE. He's goin' out to kill hisse'f!

GRANNY. Don't be no fool, Lessie.

LESSIE. But . . . Granny. . . . [*LESSIE runs to the outside door. She throws it open, steps onto the porch, and calls.*] Orry! Orry! Orry! [*There is no reply. She comes back in and closes the door. GRANNY goes into the other room muttering to herself. LESSIE goes to a chair, drops into it, and cries.*]

[*Soon the outside door opens, and ORRY comes in, silently. He goes to LESSIE's chair and drops on his knees at her feet. He touches her hand with the tips of his big fingers.*]

LESSIE. Orry!

ORRY. Lessie . . . I heard you a-callin' me. I couldn't go nowheres 'thouten astin' you . . . cud you forgive me th' way I sinned, Lessie? I guess I was . . . born silly . . . Lessie.

LESSIE. 'Course I'll forgive you, Orry. B'sides . . . you ain't silly.

ORRY. Don't cry, Lessie. Here. [*He reaches into his hip pocket for his handkerchief. He pulls out the woman's garment and dries her eyes with it.*] Don't cry, Lessie. Me and . . . you . . . we could . . . we . . . could . . . [*They both discover the "handkerchief."*]
LESSIE breaks out laughing.]

LESSIE. Oh, Orry! What you got in your hand?

ORRY. [*arising, horrified, bashful, delighted*] Lessie . . . gosh durn et . . . how . . . [*A gasp for breath.*] . . . how did that thing-a-ma-jigger get about me, annyways?

[*LESSIE laughs. ORRY breaks out laughing. He puts the garment onto the table; but not before touching his face surreptitiously with it.*]

LESSIE. I . . . I guess you ain't yourse'f t'night, are you, Orry?

ORRY. Doggone, I don't know what's th' matter with me t'night. I guess . . . [*He goes to the stove to get GRANNY'S chair to draw up to LESSIE'S.*] . . . I guess . . . [*looking shyly over his shoulder toward her*] . . . et must be . . . you, Lessie.

LESSIE. I . . . guess you're a talkin' through your hat now, ain't you, Orry? [*He starts toward her with the chair. GRANNY pokes her head in. She has on a nightcap. ORRY stops short.*]

GRANNY. You cain't fool me. I knowed you was there all th' time! You ain't such a big dunce arter all. I knowed you'd come back. You don't need t' be 'fraid-a me none no more, young feller. I figured out I'll color that-thur dress coal black an' wear et t' old Granny Dill's funeral when she dies. An' ef I die fust . . . I'll wear et t' my own. [*She grins. ORRY grins. LESSIE grins.*]

CURTAIN

THE KELLY KID¹

*By Kathleen Norris
and
Dan Totheroh*

CHARACTERS

MRS. CAHILL
MRS. MURPHY
MRS. CALLAHAN
ELLEN MURPHY
ROBBIE KELLY
OFFICER HAMILTON
OFFICER BURNS

SCENE. *The kitchen of the Murphy family on a hot June afternoon. It is a dark, smoke-stained kitchen with a door, back center, opening on a cluttered back porch. Beyond the porch is the back yard, with old elm trees in tender leaf. Left and right of the back door are smudged windows, with bedraggled curtains and cracked shades that are all the way up to let the sunlight in.*

A wood stove with pots and pans, a teapot, and a steaming kettle of water for the tea is left. Beyond the stove, in the corner, is the kitchen sink, in which are dirty dishes and pots. Also a few dishes on the drain board. A door below the stove opens into a closet where flour and potatoes are kept.

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Under left window is a sewing machine, with a sewing basket and material for a summer dress. A table, down left, within reach of the stove, has tea things on it and a loaf of bread with bread knife; also a sugar bowl and a forgotten catsup bottle. Sugar is spilled on the red-checked tablecloth.

In upper right-hand corner there is a pile of old rubbish against the wall, — frayed carpets, musty clothes, shoes, hats, etc. A trapdoor is cut in floor, center.

The right door leads into a bedroom. Around the room are straight-backed chairs, and three chairs are drawn up to the table, one a creaky rocker.

Above the table an ironing board is stretched across the backs of two chairs; and when the curtain rises, ELLEN MURPHY is ironing a collar and cuffs of real Irish lace. She is using an old-fashioned iron, which she heats on the stove.

About the table, sitting in the chairs and drinking tea, are three women — the little widow CAHILL, MRS. MURPHY, and MRS. CALLAHAN. MRS. CAHILL is small and shriveled, with work-worn hands. Although "Jarge" Cahill died about eleven years ago, she still clings to her deep mourning. Her heavy crape face veil is now pushed back so that she can drink her strong tea from a plain white cup. The ominous, musty folds cascade down her back. She is sitting at the end of the table close to the loaf of bread, from which she occasionally cuts herself a morsel to nibble at, like a small gray mouse.

MRS. MURPHY has the rocker so placed that she can reach the teapot from the top of the stove; also the kettle of hot water. She is a lean little Irish woman, with a tanned freckled face, worn with years, ill health, griefs, and worry. She wears a bedraggled black skirt, covered almost completely by a blue kitchen apron.

MRS. CALLAHAN, squarely built, with fine, satiny-black

hair and rosy coloring, sits at the table nearest the door. She wears a shabby blue suit and a last year's hat, with faded pink roses.

ELLEN MURPHY, twenty years old, is a beautiful girl with wonderful pink-and-white skin and even, white teeth. Her face is now flushed from leaning over the ironing board and from the fire in the wood stove.

The three elderly women about the table are flushed, too, but not entirely from the heat. They are discussing a very vital subject, and they lean toward each other, their keen eyes sparkling. Just now they have all raised their teacups and have all taken a deep drink, and now they all put their cups down in their saucers and begin again.

MRS. MURPHY [*the pessimist*]. There's no good in that Kelly Kid, I've always said it!

MRS. CAHILL. [*bitterly*] Glory be to the everlasting glory of God, but some harm will come to that child if they don't lock him up safe in jail!

MRS. MURPHY. [*darkly*] They'll get 'um yet!

ELLEN. [*laughing as she irons*] You're a grand lot of glooms, you perfect forty-fours! I wonder you wouldn't sit in the hot kitchen, a day like this! Why don't you go out in the back yard with grandpa and sit under the trees?

MRS. CAHILL. [*shaking her black veils, dismally*] These are bad days out-o'-dures, wid all the flu that's in it.

MRS. MURPHY. That's right, Mrs. Cahill, dear. That's perfectly right. The fresh air's full of it.

[*The three women nod and drink their tea again, and again put down their cups all together. ELLEN smiles at them and hums softly as she works.*]

MRS. CAHILL. [*with a sigh and another shake of her head*] It's boys like him what grows up to fill the jails and rob the poor boxes.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Thoughtfully. She is the level-headed member of the wrinkled trio.*] I don't know is he bad, or is he just wild and free with the bold spirits that's in him. [*She pauses, then resumes mildly.*] I seen him yesterday and I tuk it upon myself to stop him, and give 'um a word. "Robert," I says to 'um, "yure good mother that's dead would turn in her grave if she could see the way you'll be carrying on," I says. He gives me a bold, ugly look out of his bold face — [*Her voice drifts away into silence.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*with feeling*] Oh, he's a bad one! But this new cop on the beat, Hamilton, will get 'um! Ould Falley would never touch wan of thim boys, and they streelin' all over the place like Ayrabs! But this feller's a mean sort of weasel, and he'll get 'um.

MRS. CAHILL. Indeed and he will! He got Jawnnny Fay last week, and Big Jawnnny give 'um such a lickin', when he heard that he'd been took to the Juvenile, that Rosy Fay come runnin' over, the way she wouldn't hear the child holler.

ELLEN. [*with warmth*] Yes, and I think it was a dirty shame to arrest young Johnny! It's the Kelly Kid that's the ring leader, and he always goes scot-free. When Falley was on the beat, of course the whole pack of them knew they were safe, but this *Hamilton* is another pair of shoes —

MRS. CAHILL. I don't know where ever a *cop* would get a name like *Hamilton*.

MRS. CALLAHAN. He's none of our sort. He's a hard, mean kind of man, and God help Robbie Kelly the day he lays hands on 'um.

MRS. CAHILL. Well, Robbie has a very ugly step-mother — she's a nosey, wild sort, Daze.

[*The other women nod and sip their tea.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*sighing*] He had a good mother.

MRS. CAHILL. Yes. And she had him in Sunday school, and she dressed him very nice, until the very Sunday she was tuk, God rest her.

MRS. CALLAHAN. Yes. And Mack Kelly wouldn't have been a bad father to 'im if he'd lived. But Daze has got that young boy of her own that's never been right since he had scarlet fever, and him teethin', and she's hard on Robbie.

[*The three women nod again.*]

MRS. MURPHY. Sister Felix says that the child has a good heart in him, but he's wild. And he'll end in jail, and I'd never raise hand nor foot to keep him out of it! [*Her mouth snaps firmly together.*]

ELLEN. [*laughing*] Mamma's never forgiven him about the baby goat.

MRS. CALLAHAN. The baby goat — Whativer was that about?

ELLEN. Well, mamma's old Kitty had a kid here one spring and all the Eyetalians are crazy about young goats in the spring, and Robbie Kelly drove the baby goat over to the Baldocchis' and told Gemma Baldocchi that Mrs. Murphy sent it with her compliments. Mamma went down there — and the yelling! — and the screeching! — it was Duke's mixture, all right! [*She finishes with a high laugh.*]

MRS. CAHILL. [*shaking her head*] Can you imagine him doing that, Mrs. Murphy, and getting you mixed up with them dirty *Eyetalians*?

MRS. MURPHY. Yes, Mrs. Cahill, dear, it was humiliatin', it was. Oh, there's no good in the boy.

ELLEN. [*putting iron back on stove*] I'll tell you what, I don't know that it would hurt that kid to be sent up for a while. He might learn some common sense. He's got no parents, his step-mother is going to marry again, and he says he won't live with his Aunt Lily in Troy.

He'll simply go on his way until he kills someone and then it'll be jail.

MRS. MURPHY. [*hand on teapot*] That's just the way it'll be! Have some more tea, Mrs. Cahill?

MRS. CAHILL. No more, thanks, Mrs. Murphy.

MRS. MURPHY. Mrs. Callahan?

MRS. CALLAHAN. No, thanks, dear.

MRS. CAHILL. You'd wonder he *wouldn't* live with his Aunt Lily; she's a fine woman.

MRS. CALLAHAN. She has a good job in the liberry, and he could set there evenings, reading a story out of a book, until she'd be going home.

MRS. CAHILL. She'd give him a good home, and she'd like to have him for company. Lily is a fine ger'rl. The Sisters had her for the Blessed Virgin wanst in their tabloos; she looked very elegant.

MRS. MURPHY. Well, wouldn't you wonder at him? I'll go to the Judge myself one of these days and tell him that if ever there was a lad that a few years on the Island would do a world's world of good, me young gallant Robbie Kelly is the lad!

ELLEN. [*laughing*] Now, mother! —

MRS. MURPHY. [*pugnaciously*] I *will* so! I'll tell 'um that the boy could have a good home, with a fine ger'rl that's his own mother's sister, Lily Boone, but that he's so wild he wants to run the streets, stealin' goats off of decent, respectable people that has need, God knows, of every penny!

[*The three women nod, with vigor, and sip their tea.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*glancing at clock on wall*] I ought to be going, Mrs. Murphy dear.

MRS. MURPHY. Don't be off so sudden!

MRS. CAHILL. It isn't late.

MRS. MURPHY. What's your hurry?

MRS. CALLAHAN. Poor Annie's come back from the

hospital with the tiny baby. She isn't very strong and they'll be going up to visit Josie in Albany a while. The doctor says —

MRS. CAHILL. Yes, it's fine for them up there.

MRS. MURPHY. 'Twill do the baby good.

MRS. CALLAHAN. I'm thinking Annie may go to-night; she'll have a good visit with Josie and John, and may the Lord keep the little angel from heaven well and strong! [*She wipes her eyes.*]

[MRS. CAHILL *sighs deeply*. MRS. MURPHY *shakes her head.*]

MRS. CAHILL. Whatever!

MRS. MURPHY. Betune us and all har'rm, the help of God help the poor ger'rl!

[*A long, sympathetic pause as they regard each other, mournfully. The pause is broken by noise in the back yard — voices, feet upon the porch, and then the back door is flung open and the KELLY KID bursts in, a thin, dirty, tousled boy of perhaps twelve or fourteen. He is stammering and crying like a frantic little hunted animal and makes for the sewing machine by the window, getting behind it, bracing it between him and the door.*]

KELLY KID. [*yelling between wild sobs, his back to the startled occupants of the room*] You dirty big liar! I never done it — you dirty liar! You can kill me — you can kill me — but you won't send me to jail! I'll get a pistol, and I'll blow your brains out — and I don't care if I do go to the chair — I don't care if I do go to the chair — you dirty big dirty liar! —

[*The three women are on their feet.*]

MRS. CAHILL. Robbie Kelly! —

[*Mrs. Murphy runs to kitchen sink and, wetting the end of a dish towel under the cold-water faucet, she catches hold of the KELLY KID and begins wiping his dirty, tear-stained face.*]

MRS. MURPHY. Here, what's all this to-do? [*as he struggles to get away*] Here, stand still now! — What's all this, now? This is a fine way to bur'rst in upon a Christian woman! What have you been up to now, Robbie Kelly? I shouldn't wonder if the police are after you again!

KELLY KID. [*clawing at her hands*] Oh, Mis' Murphy, don't let him get me!

MRS. MURPHY. [*taking a last rub at his face*] Who?

KELLY KID. Hamilton's after me — the cop's after me and Lenny Spillane!

MRS. MURPHY. What have you been doin'?

KELLY KID. Oh, Mis' Murphy, honest to God, I never done nothin'. It was them big fellers that was foolin' with the switch, and Len and me was just lookin' at what they done —

MRS. CAHILL. [*wailing*] My God! There's been a train wreck!

KELLY KID. No, there wasn't no wreck! But the cop says there might have been, and he says he's going to have me up before Judge Casey — and Casey told me last time, he'd send me up to Randall's Island! But I'll kill him first! [*He turns his eyes toward the door.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*mildly coming up to the KELLY KID*] It's a pity you wouldn't think of that, Robbie, before now —

MRS. MURPHY. Yes! There's some that loved your good mother that thinks maybe you'd be better off for a few years, until you'd be eighteen or so, shut up where you couldn't do any harm.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*interrupting, mildly*] Many's the time I've disputed you about it, Robbie, that you should go to your good aunt, and be a comfort to her and sell a few *Posts* like Martin does, and grow up a decent man. But no, you'd be stravagin' the neighborhood,

like a wild Turk that has no God itself, and now look what's in it!

KELLY KID. I'll go to Aunt Lily — say, if you'll lend me the money for my ticket I'll go, if you'll just get me off this once! Honest I will — I know the way! If you'll get me off with the cop —

MRS. MURPHY. [*drily*] So that you can run off wid me goats again!

KELLY KID. Mrs. Callahan, won't you *please* — won't you please, for the love of God and the Blessed Virgin —! I'll go to my aunt and I'll help her — I'll split wood for her and run her errands — you'll not be sorry — *honest* — I promise you if I never promised anything in my life —

ELLEN. [*who has stood the ironing board up against the back wall, out of the way*] For Heaven's sake, Robbie Kelly, why on earth didn't you think of this before? You could have gone to your aunt when your mother died, and entered school there, and tried to make something of yourself. And now you come in with your promises and everything, when the cop's after you, and he's a new cop — nobody likes him, and his hand is against *everybody*!

MRS. CAHILL. [*moving up above table*] You got the Fay boy into trouble, and that was the very first time, and you've been up twice before Judge Casey, and you know how mad anything with the railroad makes him, because they're all down on him, anyways —

[*There is a pause as the women look at each other and shake their heads, dubiously. The KELLY KID keeps his eye on the door and the windows.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*thoughtfully*] I could go with ye to the Judge, Robbie, but I think he'll send ye up — the third time. I declare if your mother wouldn't rather see you in your grave.

KELLY KID. [*beginning to cry*] I tell you I never done it.

MRS. CAHILL. You've done enough, God knows!

KELLY KID. But I never done that! And if he takes me and sends me to jail, I'll tell him I never done it! He can send me to the chair — because he's a big liar, but I'll tell the Judge that if my mother had lived I'd tell her the same thing — and if I was dying I'd tell it — [*His voice dies away in sobs.*]

ELLEN. [*taking a frail blue handkerchief from her waist and holding it out to him*] Here — use this on your nose.

[*He is about to take it, when he hears something and whirls about.*]

MRS. CAHILL. [*who has been looking through the window*] Whisht! There's a cop in the yard!

MRS. CALLAHAN. Saints in the heavens!

MRS. CAHILL. It's Hamilton!

KELLY KID. Don't let him take me! I never done it!

ELLEN. Quick! Come with me — [*She takes the boy by the shoulder and leads him into the bedroom, closing the door.*]

MRS. MURPHY. What's she going to do with him?

MRS. CALLAHAN. I don't know. Come — let's us be sittin' natural. That's it, Mrs. Cahill! Be pourin' us some fresh tea, Mrs. Murphy.

[*MRS. MURPHY lifts up the teapot. MRS. CALLAHAN and MRS. CAHILL seat themselves at the table. MRS. MURPHY pours the tea into MRS. CAHILL's cup as MRS. CAHILL holds it out to her with a trembling hand.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*calmly*] And what was that you was sayin', Mrs. Murphy?

MRS. MURPHY. I was sayin' —

[*A rap comes on the back door.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*giving an elaborately sly wink to the other women as she sets the teapot on the table*] Now who could *that* be, Mrs. Callahan? [*She goes to the door, opening it.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*in pleased surprise*] Well, God bless us, it's Officer Hamilton. Will ye step in?

[*Enter OFFICER HAMILTON. He is a tall, stalwart, freshly uniformed young man with a truculent red face. He steps in, sending a quick glance around the room, and smiles at the ladies.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. Thanks, Mrs. Murphy.

MRS. MURPHY. Won't you sit down, sir?

[*OFFICER HAMILTON sits on edge of chair, twirling his cap in his hands, still looking about the room.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*going on*] Mrs. Callahan you know, and me friend Mrs. Cahill. I misdoubt ye don't know the whole pack of us hereabouts. [*down to table*] You wouldn't have a cup of tea while you'd be talkin'? And now what is it — it isn't the Fourth of July bar-becue yet a while?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*looking from one to the other with a slow smile*] Come now — come now —

MRS. CAHILL. [*exchanging surprised glances with MRS. CALLAHAN*] Well! whatever is it? — All this is very strange —

MRS. MURPHY. Did ye see me ould father out in the yard that we had anointed ¹ a while back?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*still smiling*] Yes, I seen Mr. Florence, and lookin' extremely well and hearty, too. [*pausing and twirling his cap*] I'm after the Kelly Kid. Where is he?

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*utterly surprised*] After —? Is it young Robbie Kelly you mean?

¹ The last rite of the Catholic Church is to anoint the dying, but the old man had made a startling recovery.

OFFICER HAMILTON. Him and young Spillane. It's the first time Spillane has been caught, and I let him off again. But me young friend Robbie goes up to the Judge on Monday, and I don't doubt they'll learn him to evade the law before they're done with him!

MRS. CAHILL. I wonder that you could be doin' all that, and you widout a warrant or annything whativer.

[*The three women nod, and MRS. CAHILL and MRS. CALLAHAN sip their tea with authority.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. He's here, all right. I seen him bolt into the yard. [*rising*] Where is he?

MRS. MURPHY. I don't know why you would chase the poor child, annyway, but whativer you do, it's neither sign nor sound of 'um you'll find in my kitchen. He'd be conthrivin' to pass out of the neighborhood entirely, I should presume, and not loither about the way you'd put hands on 'um. He's a very spry young lad, if I have 'um rightly. [*She busies herself at the sink.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*crossing to her*] Come, now — Come, now! You give me your word he's not here, and I'll believe you.

MRS. MURPHY. [*with elaborate innocence*] Where would he be? Look in me little butthry — you couldn't be hiding a young cat and his kittens in there! [*She flings open door of the closet below the stove.*] Look! Nothin' but flour an' a sack of potatoes —

OFFICER HAMILTON. No, nothin' there, Mrs. Murphy — but — [*turns and looks at bedroom door*] How about —

[*At that the bedroom door opens and ELLEN enters.*]

ELLEN. Mamma — [*Sees OFFICER HAMILTON.*] Oh, how do you do, Mr. Hamilton? [*then to ladies, looking straight into their eyes*] Mrs. Cahill, would you step in here and say good-by to Aunt Susie, and you too, Mrs. Callahan? [*to OFFICER HAMILTON*] Did mamma tell

you me aunt is in there, quite laid up with the arthritis?

[MRS. CALLAHAN and MRS. CAHILL, *her musty veils pulled down over her face, hesitate for just a moment; then pass quickly into the bedroom.*]

ELLEN. [*still standing guard at door and calling into room*] Here's Mrs. Callahan and Mrs. Cahill come to say good-bye to you, Aunt Susie! [*back to OFFICER HAMILTON*] I guess you'll want to look in there?

OFFICER HAMILTON. Yes, I would, Miss Murphy.

ELLEN. [*sympathetically*] These boys in the neighborhood, they're an awful care to you, I daresay.

OFFICER HAMILTON. You *know* they are, Miss Murphy — [*Steps toward her.*]

ELLEN. [*putting out her hand*] Just a moment. I'll let you go in there, don't worry — but me Aunt Susie has something very important to say to Mrs. Cahill. Just a moment —

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*sternly*] Now, Miss Murphy!

ELLEN. [*smiling prettily at him, using all her wiles*] You wouldn't ever think, now, Mr. Hamilton, that I would try to keep you from doing your duty?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*taken off his feet*] Well — Well — [*He backs away.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*in bedroom*] Good-bye. [*She appears in door.*] I'll be stepping on along home, Mrs. Murphy — for it's small use a house has for company, with the *police* in it! Your aunt looks better, and I don't doubt she'll be up amongst us, and herself again, in a day or two, and God grant it!

MRS. CAHILL. [*in bedroom*] And I'll go along wid Mrs. Callahan, Susan. [*pause*] Faith, and I left me bag on the bed — Wait a minute, Mrs. Callahan, dear.

MRS. CALLAHAN. All right, Mrs. Cahill.

[*Another pause. ELLEN moves over to her mother and stands beside her, reaching down for her hand.*]

MRS. MURPHY looks up at her quickly; then looks down. MRS. CALLAHAN glares at OFFICER HAMILTON, who studies each one. Then MRS. CAHILL comes out, veils down, and puts her arm in MRS. CALLAHAN'S. MRS. CALLAHAN closes the bedroom door. ELLEN grips her mother's hand.]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*sweeping out the back door with MRS. CAHILL, who seems to be a little smaller, and walks quicker*] Good-by, Mrs. Murphy — Good-by, Ellen —

MRS. MURPHY. Good-by, dear. [*Shouting after them*] Stop in whin you're passin'.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*in the yard*] Thank ye kindly, Mrs. Murphy.

[*Another pause as MRS. MURPHY looks straight ahead and ELLEN looks at OFFICER HAMILTON, head high and pert, and HAMILTON looks at her.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*at last*] Now, sir — you've looked into me butthry and seen me flour an' me potatoes, and you've druv me friends off of me house, and what else can I do for ye?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*still watching ELLEN, shrewdly*] Did you know that I delayed on my way here to ask Officer Burns to keep an eye on your windows, Miss Murphy?

ELLEN. [*flushing*] Well, I don't know why you'd do that, Mr. Hamilton!

OFFICER HAMILTON. So that nobody could help anybody else out of one of them, for instance.

ELLEN. [*stoutly*] There's nobody in that room there but my Aunt Susan, sick in bed. I don't know what you're driving at!

MRS. MURPHY. [*shrilly*] And if you arrest that child — and you with neither warrant nor writ — a child that's got no mother, and whatever has he done but

just a few thricks that would make a decent man laugh at 'um, let alone arrest 'um!

OFFICER HAMILTON. It's my business to see that the law is respected! If he's not here, I'm sure I'm sorry that I broke up your tea party. [*stepping toward bedroom door*] And if you'll let me give one look at — that — sick — aunt — of yours — [*straight at ELLEN*] then I'll thank you and take my leave! [*hand on door knob.*]

ELLEN. Saving your presence, my aunt's not young, and she's sick in bed —

OFFICER HAMILTON. I won't disturb her —

MRS. MURPHY. [*whispering through stiff lips*] It's no use, Ellen.

ELLEN. Shhh! [*grips her mother's arm, as OFFICER HAMILTON quickly opens the bedroom door*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*in a gasp*] Run, Robbie — run for your life!

ELLEN. [*clapping her hand over her mother's mouth*] Shhh!

[*A pause as OFFICER HAMILTON searches the room.*

ELLEN and MRS. MURPHY do not move.]

[*Reënter OFFICER HAMILTON, looking puzzled. He closes the door gently behind him.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. I didn't disturb your aunt. She seemed to be sleeping. [*He shoots another glance at ELLEN; then steps up to back door and blows his whistle. MRS. MURPHY starts perceptibly and trembles.*]

[*In a moment OFFICER BURNS, young and dark, enters through the back yard.*]

OFFICER BURNS. Did you find him?

OFFICER HAMILTON. No, but he's here, somewhere, Burns.

ELLEN. [*turning a killing glance on young OFFICER BURNS*] If you weren't the best dancer ever, Frank, I'd have you both arrested for breaking into Mamma's house and scaring the wits out of us all.

OFFICER BURNS. [*blushing*] Well, here's the thing, Miss Ellen. The boy's been making trouble for everybody. It'll be for his own good that he's shut up a while; it'll teach him a lesson!

ELLEN. Teach him all the lessons you want to, Frank, although I'll bet *you* weren't any Child Ignatius ¹ yourself, if I remember rightly, when you were his age.

OFFICER BURNS. [*helpless*] No, but —

ELLEN. Then don't waste time running around annoying people worse than a *hundred* Kelly Kids could annoy them.

MRS. MURPHY. [*in a high wail*] And him a posthumous child that never seen hide nor hair of his own father, that died on him before he was born!

OFFICER BURNS. Do you know what he did? Monkeying with the railway switch. It's manslaughter! —

ELLEN. [*giving him a most disquieting glance*] But don't you have to have warrants, and search warrants and all that sort of thing, to do this, Frank?

OFFICER BURNS. [*all confused and dismayed*] Well — but — but isn't it — isn't it better to have him in a *corrective institution* for a few years, instead of in jail for life?

ELLEN. [*smiling alluringly at him*] Ah, but there's no *real* harm in a child like that.

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*who has been prowling about*] Cellar? [*He taps with his foot on the trapdoor.*]

MRS. MURPHY. There is not! It's the bathtub with some onions and turnips and a can of kerosene in it. Look for yourself!

[OFFICER HAMILTON *lifts up trap; then drops it again sheepishly.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*assuming a firm, harsh attitude*]

¹ Legend declares St. Ignatius to have been the child whom Jesus took in his arms, *Mark*, ix. 36-37.

Well, now, *where* is he? He run in here — we *both* seen that. You can't hide him forever; it can't be done. I'll nab him the minute I lay eyes on him, and it'll only go the worse for him if I have to tell the court that he run off on me. Resisting the law —

ELLEN. [*smartly*] A kid runnin' away from a cop isn't resistin' the law. I'll bet you used to run from them yourself, and think nothing at all about it! The child didn't do anything. He said himself that he and the Spillane boy —

OFFICER HAMILTON. Aha! He *was* in here then!

ELLEN. [*flushing, but looking at him squarely*] Well, what if he was? He run off again. He just ran by, through the yard, and through the back gate out onto the hill.

MRS. MURPHY. [*jumping in*] Yes! There's a pat' goes down past Harrison's place, that you'd be takin' and you steppin' to the market.

OFFICER BURNS. He did not. I never took me eyes off the house.

MRS. MURPHY. Well, wouldn't you think we was all the one for lies and inthrigues! That's the police for it! They'll find you a murther as aisy as you'd pick up a button you'd dhropped on the flure. "Cap him into jail," says they, "and we'll find means and ways to keep 'um there!" There was a feller back in the ould country, and him a dacint, God-fearin' lad that had a cousin at Maynooth¹ itself, and the good mother he had on him —

OFFICER BURNS. [*coaxingly*] Come on, where is he, Miss Ellen?

ELLEN. [*briskly*] Do you think, if I knew where he was, which I don't, that I'd let you haul out that poor little fellow, and keep him in the Juvenile Detention

¹ An Irish seminary where boys are trained for the priesthood.

two days — among thieves and God knows what, and then have him up before Casey, to ruin his life on him? Shame on you! You and Mr. Hamilton are in a fine business chasing a child around the block, with the speeders right here on South street killing nuns and Eyetalian babies and dear knows what all! [*Her eyes are blazing.*]

OFFICER BURNS. [*with admiration*] God help your husband, Ellen, when you get going!

ELLEN. Well, I hope he will! [*turning her back on the two officers and going to the bedroom door*] If you've both looked your fill of my aunt's room, I hope you'll excuse my shutting the door, she's trying to get some sleep! [*She closes the door gently, after looking in.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. This'll all be told to the Judge —

MRS. MURPHY. [*busy at sink*] You'll tell him more than your prayers, I don't doubt that!

ELLEN. [*making for the back door, up to OFFICER HAMILTON*] And now, if you don't mind, I'll go bring my grandfather in from the back yard. Of course, if you're thinking to stay to supper without an invite —

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*looking at pile of old clothes in corner*] Wait a minute! What's under those old carpets?

ELLEN. [*standing before it, eyes blazing*] It's just nothing but rubbish!

MRS. MURPHY. [*turning from sink*] It's been there this fortnight, until I could sort it all out for the Sisters' Rumridge Sale they're going to have. Sure you couldn't hide a Galway pig there —

ELLEN. Just kindly take *my* word for it.

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*taking broom from corner*] I'm sorry I can't! [*He begins to rifle the heap, throwing things all about.*]

ELLEN. [*stepping aside*] Oh! Look what you're doing!

MRS. MURPHY. Now I'll have to sweep the floor!

OFFICER HAMILTON. No, there's nothing there! You don't see anything there, do you, Burns?

OFFICER BURNS. [*smiling*] I do not, Hamilton.

ELLEN. [*her cheeks blazing scarlet as she steps up to OFFICER HAMILTON.*] We've had enough of this nonsense! Probably the Kelly Kid has made Brooklyn by this time; I hope he has! He's got cousins there, and there's plenty of people he knows! If you'd be so kind as to vacate the premises, I'll get my grandfather's milk toast ready for him! —

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*saluting*] All right, Miss Murphy. You win. Come on, Burns. I don't know how she did it, but she did! [*in back door*] Good-by, Miss Murphy. Good-by, Mrs. Murphy.

MRS. MURPHY. Is it gettin' rid of ye at last we are?

OFFICER HAMILTON. It is, Mrs. Murphy.

[*He exits, followed by BURNS, who grins at ELLEN.*]

[*ELLEN and MRS. MURPHY watch through the windows until they pass from sight, and then ELLEN collapses in a chair.*]

ELLEN. Phew!

MRS. MURPHY. Whatever — whatever happened to him, Ellen?

ELLEN. [*beginning to laugh*] Who?

MRS. MURPHY. Why, Robbie Kelly! Whatever did you do with him? Is it a magician you are? — And who's Aunt Susie?

ELLEN. [*still laughing*] Don't you know your own relatives? Wait a minute! [*She jumps up and runs to window and looks carefully out to make sure that the officers have really gone. Then she runs to bedroom door. She opens it and peeks in. She laughs again. She whistles softly.*] It's all right. He's gone!

MRS. MURPHY. Whoiver? [*She waits, breathlessly.*]

[Enter MRS. CAHILL, dressed in a sodden but brilliantly flowered kimono that hangs about her tiny, shriveled form in wild folds.]

MRS. CAHILL. He's gone, has he?

MRS. MURPHY. [mouth hanging open] Mrs. Cahill! — Why — why — you wint out that door with Mrs. Callahan!

MRS. CAHILL. I did not! That was the Kelly Kid.

MRS. MURPHY. The Kelly Kid? — In *your* widder's weeds?

MRS. CAHILL. Yes. [tottering toward table] Pour me a cup of tea, Mrs. Murphy, dear, will you? I'm faint. [She sits in chair.] I never laid so still in me life as whin he come in to look at me. It was like I was laid out in me shroud — [She looks down at the flowered kimono, shaking her head.]

MRS. MURPHY. [pouring tea] Ellen Murphy, I'm proud of you! Here, Mrs. Cahill, drink this. It's good an' strong and you deserve it.

ELLEN. I just took a chance and it worked.

MRS. MURPHY. Now that I think about it, there was somethin' strange about his walk an' his figger — [She pours tea for herself.]

ELLEN. I thought I'd die when he started out on Mrs. Callahan's arm. He walked so fast I thought he'd trip.

MRS. CAHILL. My heart was in my mouth whin he left the bedroom.

[MRS. CALLAHAN is seen through window, walking fast, a bundle under her arm. She bursts into the room.]

MRS. MURPHY. Mrs. Callahan!

ELLEN. Oh, Mrs. Callahan, is it all right?

MRS. CALLAHAN. [panting for breath] Yes, dear, it's all right. [She falls into a chair, her big bosom heaving.]

MRS. MURPHY. [*to MRS. CALLAHAN*] Have some tea, dear. You're worn out!

MRS. CALLAHAN. Thanks, Mrs. Murphy.

ELLEN. Did he get off with Annie?

MRS. CALLAHAN. As easy as kiss your hand. He had Martin's old overcoat onto him, and they walked out of the house as quiet as birds. He'll stay at Josie's to-night and go to his aunt tomorrow and nobody the wiser — [*taking tea from MRS. MURPHY*] Thank you, dear. [*taking sugar and stirring*] The poor child! He kissed me good-by as solemn as a priest. I wouldn't wonder would he be a bishop yet! [*She drinks.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*drinking her own tea*] What a day!

ELLEN. When Hamilton asked what was under the carpets! — [*She laughs.*]

MRS. MURPHY. Saints in Heaven, the dirty look you give him, Ellen, when you let out that you'd seen the kid!

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*laughing*] He — he looked — Oh, the dear Lord preserve us! Whin Hamilton gives me a good clear look, as we wint out, me heart died on me!

MRS. CAHILL. Mine died on me in the bed there!

MRS. CALLAHAN. And whin Robbie Kelly walked with me into me kitchen, dressed for all the world like a widow that's lost her husband — Well, I thought Annie Curley would drop dead where she stud!

MRS. CAHILL. [*proudly*] I stipty into the bedroom and I joomped out of me old dress and t'rew the veil over his head. "Off wit' you!" I says. Wid that, Mrs. Callahan begun to talk to 'um. "Mrs. Cahill," she says, "will you l'ave me have a tasteen of your butter-milk the night?" she says. [*sputtering*] Oh, dear Lord, preserve and defend us by the glory and goodness of God — out they walked, wit'in t'ree inches of Hamil-

ton's nose itself — Is that my clothes? [*pointing with her teaspoon at the bundle on MRS. CALLAHAN's lap*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. Yes, dear. I tried not to muss 'um.

MRS. CAHILL. I'll be puttin' 'um on. Whativer would Jarge Cahill be thinkin' if he saw me like this!

[*They all laugh, and the teacups go up in unison.*

They smack their lips. ELLEN goes up near window and stands looking out. The sun is going down. The little, cluttered kitchen is getting dark.

There is a pause.]

MRS. MURPHY. [*at last, solemnly*] We'll miss the child.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*agreeing, with a sigh*] We will that. Never will I forget the night him and the Spillane boy tuk two old carriage lamps and wint out onto the highway. And whin a car was coming along in the dark, wouldn't they move up to it as if they was another autymobile until they was within fifteen feet, and thin the two of them *split*, and one go each side of the poor feller that was tryin' to drive — [*chuckles from the three old ladies*]

ELLEN. Yes, and the day he took Annie's baby and put Katie Oliver's kid in the coach —

MRS. CALLAHAN. Oh, the Lord be good to us, that was a day!

MRS. MURPHY. Bad luck to the police that'd run him out of the neighborhood.

MRS. CAHILL. I was thinkin' I might have him down for Christmas wid Rose's children.

MRS. CALLAHAN. He could run around with Martin. There's no harm to the child.

MRS. MURPHY. I'll send Lily Boone a fiver, next Christmas, and ask him down.

ELLEN. We'll get Josie and John to keep an eye on him, and see he has a good time.

MRS. CALLAHAN. That'll be grand!

[*Another pause. They all drink again. The kitchen becomes darker. They all sigh.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*at the end of her sigh*] Oh, well, they're *always* persecutin' somebody.

CURTAIN



LYNN RIGGS

KNIVES FROM SYRIA ¹

By Lynn Riggs

CHARACTERS

MRS. BUSTER, *a widow*

RHODIE, *her daughter*

CHARLEY, *the hired man*

THE SYRIAN PEDDLER

SCENE. Oklahoma farm living room.

TIME. Present.

The scene is an Oklahoma farm living room, about eight o'clock of an evening in October. Organ, with a stool, against the right wall. A chair, farther toward the center of the room, is before it. An old bench against the right wall in the corner. In the back wall, center, a door. To its right a window, curtained. To the left of the door, a tall food cabinet, or "safe," with a lantern hanging from it. A door, left, goes into the bedroom. Downstage, left, is a table, with two chairs — one at its right, one before it downstage. On the table, an old red cloth, RHODIE's sewing basket, and a tall lamp. On the organ, magazines, papers, a Bible, and a pistol. On the walls, cheap prints and crayon enlargements. A few rag rugs on the floor.

When the curtain rises, MRS. BUSTER is sitting in the chair, right. She is a gaunt, leathery-faced woman still definitely young. She wears a coarse calico dress drawn

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in at the waist and coming out again over wide hips. Over her dress she wears an apron. Her daughter, RHODIE, is about eighteen, a creature of the soil, with the quiet power and poise of an animal. Her hair is braided in two long yellow coils like thick ropes, and brought forward in front of her shoulders, and down into her lap. She is sewing before the table, left. Her dress is a coarse print, formless and ugly. She wears flat, slatternly slippers and white stockings.

MRS. BUSTER. [*going to the window and peering out — anxiously*] They ain't a sign of him, Rhodie.

RHODIE. Well, I wisht you'd quit yer worr'in' about him, maw. He ain't had time to git to Verdigree and back yit. Give him a little time. Ye've been fidgetin' for half a hour.

MRS. BUSTER. Well, I ain't noticed you a-doin' any fidgetin'. 'Pears to me if some one I was *more'n* interested in was out somewhere, and mebbe in danger of his life —

RHODIE. [*scornfully*] Danger of his life! Charley's went to Verdigree to git his horse shod, and you expect him back afore he's hardly had time to git there! [*slyly*] And the only *real* danger he's in is a-gettin' mixed up with that gal in the grocery store at the Switch —

MRS. BUSTER. They's other dangers. Whut if his horse 'ud fall down, step in one o' them prairie dog holes? It 'ud throw Charley off, and mebbe break his neck. And they's hold-up men about, too. One held up a man here on Cat Crick not two weeks ago and near killed him. 'Twas old Bill Wyche hisself. I heerd him tellin' it in at Foster's grocery store Satiddy. [*She goes over and picks up the Bible from the organ.*] Rhodie, I'm a-gonna read a passage from the Bible t' keep him

safe. No tellin' whut harm it'll save him frum. [*She crosses and sits down in the other chair at the table, left. She opens the Bible and reads.*] "And he shall bring the bullock before the congregation of the Lord. And he shall lay his hands on the bullock's head, and he shall kill the bullock before the congregation of the Lord." Rhodie, whut's become of that slip of paper I had in here?

RHODIE. I put it in the back. Why?

MRS. BUSTER. It tells on it whut passage to read to stop the flow of blood. Mebbe I better read that too.

RHODIE. [*amused*] But, maw, whut if Charley ain't a-bleedin'?

MRS. BUSTER. Makes no difference. If he is, this'll stop it. "To stop the flow of blood read 'Ezekiel,' Chapter 16, Verse 6." [*reading*] "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live." Now.

RHODIE. Maw, don't it tell somewhere there a passage to read that'll keep Charley frum fallin' in love with that gal?

MRS. BUSTER. [*severely*] Now, Rhodie, quit yer mockin'! Ye're a-makin' light of God's word. And ye're sinnin' when ye do it. And if Charley did go and git interested in that gal, it'll little *you'd* care!

RHODIE. Why should I care?

MRS. NUSTER. You *ought* to! Ye're a-goin' t' marry him, ain't ye? I've always wanted that and you know it. [*firmly*] Ye'll *have* t' marry him, Rhodie.

RHODIE. [*wearily*] I reckon so. They don't seem to be no way out of it. But, maw, why is it ye're so anxious to have me marry him? He's fifteen years older'n me if he's a day —

MRS. BUSTER. [*sharply*] Whut's age got to do with it? We've got to have a hand to run the place, Rhodie. Whut good 'ud us two women be without one? And we cain't afford to hire one, you know that as well as me —

RHODIE. But it ain't right, it ain't fair! This marr'in' was all *yore* idee. Looks like I might have a sayso —

MRS. BUSTER. Botheration! Do you think you could do any better?

RHODIE. No, I guess not.

MRS. BUSTER. Who would ye git if ye didn't take Charley?

RHODIE. [*hesitating*] Why — why, maw, no one, I reckon.

MRS. BUSTER. Mebbe ye're a-thinkin' of Earl Baker, him that helped us last year at hayin' time.

RHODIE. [*scornfully*] Him? Good-fer-nothin' fool! That's whut Earl Baker is. All he thinks of is playin' tricks on people.

MRS. BUSTER. Well, if it ain't Earl Baker, it might be old Bill Wyche's boy —

RHODIE. Yes, it might be — but it ain't.

MRS. BUSTER. [*suspiciously*] Air ye got yer mind set on marr'in' some one else, Rhodie?

RHODIE. No, maw. No one. And whut if I did? 'Twouldn't make no difference.

MRS. BUSTER. Ye're a-thinkin' of some one else, Rhodie. Who is it? [*with sudden penetration*] Rhodie! You ain't thinkin' of that peddler, air ye?

RHODIE. Mebbe I am.

MRS. BUSTER. [*incredulous*] That Syrian?

RHODIE. [*wistfully*] Mebbe —

MRS. BUSTER. Rhodie Buster! You'd marry that foreigner, that Syrian peddler that'd beat you every day and never have no home to keep ye in?

RHODIE. 'Course not, maw. I was jest a-jokin'. Only I could do it if I wanted to.

MRS. BUSTER. 'Course ye could! [*She goes over to the organ, puts the Bible back, and is fumbling among the papers.*] Whut's become of that letter he wrote ye — [*with scorn*] a-askin' ye t' marry him? I put it right here.

RHODIE. I've got it, maw.

MRS. BUSTER. Where?

RHODIE. Here. [*She takes it out of her dress.* MRS. BUSTER *looks at her in astonishment.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [*coming over*] You been wearin' it around?

RHODIE. It — it had a mighty purty onvelope. And he writes so nice. [*opening the letter*] Whut was it he said about the lace cap he sent me?

MRS. BUSTER. [*snatching the letter*] Never mind, I'll find it. [*reading*] "Put it on at once. You will look like a princess with yore golden hair. And mebbe the prince you have waited for — will come to kiss you into joy." Humph! Fine idees to put in yer head! [*examining letter*] He was to be in Claremore on the ninth or tenth and come on out. *This* is the tenth, ain't it, Rhodie? He'll have to be showin' up right away. [*She goes toward the organ.*] I remember the first time we ever seen him — this peddler. It was three years ago, jest after paw died. Uncle Tom was here — he had that widder from Spiro here to see us. We set out there at the end of the house when he come up. He was twirlin' his mustache, awful smart-alec, and he starts talkin' a blue streak, tellin' jokes, and actin' up.

RHODIE. Yes, and we near died laughin'. After he left we talked about him fer weeks. He kind-a livened things up, didn't he?

MRS. BUSTER. [*sharply*] Yes. But it's one thing to

have him make ye forgit yer troubles, and it's another t' marry him. [*She sits down in the chair, right.*] Besides, he's a foreigner who goes traipsin' all over the world.

RHODIE. I know. But it must be nice to travel and see foreign lands.

MRS. BUSTER. Is they anything wrong with the land right here?

RHODIE. It's all right. But it's always the same — always the same. [*with surprising fire*] I git tired of it. I ain't old, maw, I'm young. And I ain't never knowed anything but jest right here —

MRS. BUSTER. Well, it's good enough fer you I reckon, or fer anybody. And besides, if you ain't raily promised to Charley, he kind-a understands that you'll marry him come Christmas. Don't this — this Syrian peddler know about Charley?

RHODIE. [*wearily*] Yes, he knows. I told him last summer when he was here.

MRS. BUSTER. Then he knows Charley's yore choice?

RHODIE. He knows — I told him I was supposed to marry some one else —

MRS. BUSTER. [*with finality*] Well, then — that's settled. [*She goes again to the window.* RHODIE, *seeing her mother's back is turned, crosses over, secures the letter from the organ, and hides it again in her dress.*]

RHODIE. [*turning suddenly*] Whut's that?

MRS. BUSTER. [*looking out the window*] It's Charley! Why, his horse is a-runnin'! [*She is alarmed.*] Whut do you suppose has happened? Mebbe his horse is runnin' away. Mebbe he's hurt. No, he's jumpin' off. He ain't hurt, then. He's runnin' in — sumpin's happened to him!

[*There is a great clatter of hoofs, footsteps, then the door is flung open by CHARLEY, a tall, overalled*

man about thirty-three, with the red face and hands of the farm laborer. He closes the door hurriedly. He is hatless. His breath comes in short gasps. He sinks into the chair at right of table.]

CHARLEY. Mrs. Buster! Someone's after me. [MRS. BUSTER moves nearer, agitated by his fright.] I was crossin' the hayfield. It was black as pitch. Shorty kept snortin' and wanted to run. And right by that big stack, you know the one, close to the crick, a man jumped out and tried to grab the bridle! Shorty started runnin'! He run all the way home!

MRS. BUSTER. Who was it? Didn't you see? Couldn't ye git a look at him?

CHARLEY. No, it was too dark. But he had a bandanna tied over his mouth. It wasn't white, it was some dark color — red or blue. And while his one hand was grabbin' at the bridle the other one grazed my hand. Look! [*He shows a long bleeding scratch on his hand.*] He had a knife! He woulda killed me!

MRS. BUSTER. Charley! You're hurt!

CHARLEY. Aw, I ain't hurt none. It's jest a scratch. But he'd 'a' killed me shore, if it hadn't 'a' been for Shorty. [RHODIE sits down again, right. CHARLEY begins to be a little ashamed of his fright.] I ain't a-feard of him. I'd meet him anywheres in a fair fight. [*with determination*] I'm goin' back. I'll show him. [*He is half-way to the door.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [*stopping him*] Charley! Charley! You mustn't! I'm a-feard fer ye.

CHARLEY. [*slowly*] You're a-feard fer me?

MRS. BUSTER. Yes. Promise you won't go back.

CHARLEY. I ain't a-feard of him!

MRS. BUSTER. No. I know ye're not. [*pleading*] Ye're not.

CHARLEY. But I'll have to go out again, anyways.

I'll have to feed Shorty. I ain't fed him yit. I'd better feed him, I reckon. [*He goes to the door and turns.* MRS. BUSTER, *very worried, goes left, back of the table.*] Now don't git worried about it, Mrs. Buster. [*He looks at RHODIE, who is re-reading her letter.*] Rhodie ain't. They ain't no harm done. [*coming down a little*] You ain't a-feard fer me to leave fer a minute or two, air ye?

MRS. BUSTER. I ain't a-feard to stay here, Charley. But I don't like the idee of yore goin' to the barn. It's a long ways off —

CHARLEY. But I got to feed Shorty, Mrs. Buster. I won't be long.

MRS. BUSTER. Well, then you better take the lantern. [*She goes over toward the cabinet, on which a lantern is hanging.*]

CHARLEY. I better *not* have the lantern, I reckon. But I better have my gun. [*He crosses to the organ and secures a pistol, comes back, and is about to open the door.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [*coming to him — anxiously*] Ye'll be keerful, won't you, Charley?

CHARLEY. [*patting her shoulder*] Yes, I'll be keerful — Martha. [*He goes out.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [MRS. BUSTER'S *tired brown face takes on a new look. She stands a moment without speaking. Then she clasps her hands and moves nervously to the window.*] Who could it 'a' been? Whut if I hadn't 'a' read the Bible, Rhodie? Now ye see, fer all yer scoffin'. [*She comes down and sits in the chair, right of table.*] Oh, I hope he won't be gone long! [*She is very nervous and excited still.*]

RHODIE. I wouldn't worry so much, maw.

MRS. BUSTER. No, *you* wouldn't. He could be killed and butchered up, and you wouldn't be worried.

RHODIE. It don't help him none.

MRS. BUSTER. You ain't human, Rhodie.

RHODIE. I'm human, maw — but *I* ain't in love with Charley.

MRS. BUSTER. You'd do well to be. If you was, mebbe you'd not only be anxious about him. Mebbe you'd be like folks that have throwed away everything for the sake of some one they loved.

RHODIE. [*wonderingly*] Would it be human to do that?

MRS. BUSTER. Love ain't human. It's unhuman. It's a terrible cruel thing.

RHODIE. And whut if some one stands in the way of it?

MRS. BUSTER. [*afraid to say more, in her indecision*] Oh, don't ask me! It's hard — hard to know whut to do. It's hard to choose. Who could it 'a' been tried to git him? He ain't got no enemies —

RHODIE. It could-a been the same one that tried to git him last night.

MRS. BUSTER. Last night!

RHODIE. Yes, at the crossin' a mile up the road.

MRS. BUSTER. Rhodie! At the crossin'? Some one tried to git him last night? Why didn't I know?

RHODIE. *You was not* to know. Charley told me this mornin'.

MRS. BUSTER. He told you?

RHODIE. Yes.

MRS. BUSTER. Why didn't he want me to know?

RHODIE. He was afeard of havin' you worried about him.

MRS. BUSTER. Why should he keer if I was worried?

RHODIE. I don't know.

MRS. BUSTER. [*Is silent and thoughtful a moment. Then she goes restlessly to the window and looks out.*]

Oh, I wish he'd hurry! I wish he'd hurry! [*turning — thoughtfully*] Whut if this man followed Charley on home? He must be some one with a grudge agin him. He could be hidin' in the barn while Charley come in here. And Charley's gone out there! He's out there now — and this man is mebbe hid there a-waitin' fer him — a-waitin' so he can — Oh, mebbe this minute he's a — [*There is a noise outside. MRS. BUSTER and RHODIE are frozen into silence. Then MRS. BUSTER rushes to the door.*] Oh, he's back! He's back! [*She stops and turns, doubt on her face.*] No. He ain't had time. Whut if it wouldn't be Charley? Whut if it 'ud be — *him!*

[*There is a knock. RHODIE rises. Then another knock — more imperious. MRS. BUSTER and RHODIE dare not move. The latch is lifted. The women shrink back in terror. The door is flung open. On the threshold stands a short, dark man dressed in an ordinary dark suit. He has a black mustache. Around his neck is a red bandanna. In one hand he holds a heavy grip. It is the Syrian PEDDLER.*]

PEDDLER. [*with a slight accent*] Good evening to you, ladies! [*He bows elaborately, smiles, steps into the room, and closes the door.*]

MRS. BUSTER. You! Whut are *you* doin' —

PEDDLER. Yes, *I*, at your service. You weren't expecting me?

RHODIE. Why — no, we — well, we thought —

PEDDLER. [*He seems a little puzzled by his reception. RHODIE and MRS. BUSTER exchange glances. MRS. BUSTER is terror-stricken. RHODIE is puzzled and uncertain.*] You thought I would not come after — after supper, I guess. [*He sets his suitcase down about center stage, just right of the chair at table.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [*excitedly*] Which way did ye come frum? I didn't hear no buggy drive up.

PEDDLER. Oh, I walked. It is so little! It is three miles only. They was no buggy to be had. How have you been, Mrs. Buster? You're looking fine, very fine.

MRS. BUSTER. I been fair, I reckon. We — we got your letter. [*RHODIE attempts to silence her. Wait! her eyes ask. But* MRS. BUSTER *goes on, nervously.*] We got it. And we don't think — we cain't have — [*firmly*] Rhodie cain't marry you. [*RHODIE sinks into her chair.*]

PEDDLER. [*in a low voice*] That is what you think? That is final, Mrs. Buster?

MRS. BUSTER. Of course it's final! And the sooner ye give up the idee, the better fer ye.

PEDDLER. [*to RHODIE, appealingly — with dignity*] And you — is this your answer, too — Rhodie?

RHODIE. [*Her head droops. She is about to remonstrate. But* MRS. BUSTER's *eyes are on her. She cannot ignore their command.*] Yes, it's my answer.

PEDDLER. [*Is about to argue the question, but thinks better of it. He throws up his hands in a gesture of submission.*] All right! [*He says this jovially and, dropping on his knees, opens one of the bags.*] We won't let it spoil things, our evening. Let me show you what I've got. [*He begins taking things out of the case.*]

MRS. BUSTER [*to RHODIE*] See! The handkerchief! It's him — he's the one!

RHODIE. Sh! No, no!

MRS. BUSTER. Do you suppose he — Charley! Did he see Charley?

RHODIE. He ain't seen Charley. Be still!

PEDDLER. [*as he takes them out of the case*] Syrian tablecloths, drawnwork from the little villages of

Mexico, Dutch caps, beads from the shops of Paris, Italian colognes. See here, a jacket of many colors from the land of Egypt. Try it on, Mrs. Buster. [*He throws it over her shoulders. She draws back. But he goes on.*] Ah, divine! You will keep it? How much better you look in it than Mrs. Richards at Claremore — you know her, the doctor's wife. She bought a coat just like it. [*The PEDDLER goes back to his suitcase, kneels, and takes out a lacquered box.*] Japanese lacquered box from the cities of the Chong-Chong. Slant-eyed women patting around in lovely silks. Their hearts are on the sea, I think, with their lovers. Their jewels are here — in the box. [*He opens the box.*] Rubies, garnets, old gold, old silver rings. [*He goes over, hands MRS. BUSTER a handful. She handles them gingerly. They glitter in the light. The PEDDLER laughs and goes back to the suitcase.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [*crossing to him*] I don't want these! I don't want none of these things! [*She throws the rings and the coat back into the suitcase. The PEDDLER has turned over a rose-colored tablecloth. MRS. BUSTER starts at what she sees underneath. Pointing.*] Whut's them! Whut's them things?

PEDDLER. [*taking them out one by one*] Knives! Knives from Syria! Pearl-handled, ten inches long. Blades of the very fine steel. Made to cut a hair — or a throat. [*MRS. BUSTER steps back in alarm.*] In my country the robbers carry them in their belts. [*He rises.*] Many a throat is cut, many a good woman widowed by blades like these! They are so *very* sharp. See! [*He runs a hand along a blade, and laughs sardonically, enjoying his histrionism.*] And not only the bandits find them of use, Mrs. Buster. [*darkly*] The husband who does not trust his wife, the son mistreated by his father, the lover crossed in his love — When

there's two men who want the same girl, Mrs. Buster, it is knives they use to see who gets her —

MRS. BUSTER. You mean —?

PEDDLER. Oh, it is so very simple. One kills the other —

MRS. BUSTER. Oh! You'd kill —?

PEDDLER. We think not so much about it. One dies anyway — one has to.

MRS. BUSTER. It's murder! You'd do this — you?

PEDDLER. I am a Syrian. [*laughs*] But here! [*He picks it up.*] This fine rose-colored tablecloth — matchless linen it is. It is for you. For you I got it special in my homeland. [*He puts it into her hands. She has shrunk back farther and farther, and is now back of RHODIE's chair.*] Put it on your table. Then though the fare be not so much, and the purse low, the eye will be brighter and the heart lighter for its beauty. [*change of tone — softly*] But I have give you nothing, Rhodie. What will you have? Jewels? Linens? An embroidered scarf? Or a bright handkerchief from Slovakia? [*He is back at the suitcase now.*]

RHODIE. [*rising*] It don't matter. [*She comes over and kneels, right of PEDDLER.*] Do you really sell things like these?

PEDDLER. Oh, yes! People like them. They are beautiful, they are lovely things.

RHODIE. But it must be hard going from farm to farm —

PEDDLER. It is hard — [*softly*] and lonesome, a little. But the people who love beautiful things are very kind. And there is always the sky, and the rich brown earth, and waters flowing, and sunlight everywhere. Always I stop my horse on a high hill that looks into the fertile valley, and I say: "I go now into a new world. And if there is hunger there, and tongues that

are mean, and bad dogs — I will come out again soon. It cannot be forever. And there are always more and more hills, and I am free to go to them — whenever I choose!"

RHODIE. [*standing up — breathless*] It 'ud be beautiful!

PEDDLER. [*softly*] If only you could share it with me —

RHODIE. [*She goes over and sinks into the chair in front of the table hopelessly.*] If I could!

MRS. BUSTER. [*coming down to the PEDDLER — with decision*] She can. Mebbe it's best. [*She turns, buries her face in her apron.*]

PEDDLER. Mrs. Buster! You will let her? She will go with me? [*angrily*] You are fooling me?

MRS. BUSTER. No! No!

PEDDLER. You mean it?

MRS. BUSTER. Yes —

PEDDLER. She will marry me?

MRS. BUSTER. [*desperately*] Oh, yes!

PEDDLER. You have changed your mind. It is lucky — lucky for me. But you will change again. Tomorrow you will say no —

MRS. BUSTER. Oh, I tell you — I'll let her go. She'll go with you.

PEDDLER. You say so now. But tomorrow — Oh, if only I could be sure you mean it. Ah! You will swear? You will swear she can go, and then I believe you.

MRS. BUSTER. I tell you she can go.

PEDDLER. [*persisting*] You will swear — on the Bible! Where is your Bible? Give me the Bible!

MRS. BUSTER. [*She gets the Bible, reluctantly, from the organ, and hands it to him*] Here.

PEDDLER. Say it after me: I swear that Rhodie will marry you tomorrow.

MRS. BUSTER. I — I cain't do that. It ain't necessary. I told you I'd changed my mind —

PEDDLER. And you will change again. No, Mrs. Buster, you'll have to swear it.

MRS. BUSTER. Ye're makin' me do this. Ye're makin' me. I didn't mean —

PEDDLER. Swear, Mrs. Buster.

MRS. BUSTER. [*After a frightened glance at RHODIE, she puts her hand on the Bible. She is trembling.*] I swear that Rhodie will marry you — tomorrow. [*She bursts into tears.*]

PEDDLER. [*softening*] There, there, Mrs. Buster, I didn't mean to be hard. I only wanted to be sure of her. [*He is about to touch her.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [*turning on him*] Oh, she'll go with you. I've sworn it. You won't harm no one — now, will you?

PEDDLER. [*genuinely puzzled*] Why, I wouldn't harm you — or any one.

MRS. BUSTER. Oh, please! Please go now!

PEDDLER. [*Crossing to RHODIE. She rises.*] Mebbe I better leave now. I better go. She's upset. I'll be back for you tomorrow — with the preacher. You are sorry, no?

RHODIE. No, I'm glad. [*The PEDDLER takes her hands tenderly.*] I am. Honest!

PEDDLER. Well, then, good-by. I'll leave the things here until tomorrow. Good-by, then. [*He goes toward the door — softly.*] Tomorrow! [*He goes out. RHODIE goes toward the door.*]

MRS. BUSTER. [*rushing to RHODIE*] He'll come back tomorrow! Oh, whut'll we do then? He made me swear you'd go with him. He *made* me, I tell you! I didn't mean to. It was *him*! He would 'a' killed Charley; he would 'a' killed us all. I knowed he was the one when

I seen the handkerchief, and then the knives. Oh, I *had* to tell him you'd go!

RHODIE. [*shaking her off*] He didn't do it! He didn't do it! And whut if he did?

MRS. BUSTER. But we'll find a way; they must be a way out of it —

RHODIE. [*scornfully*] You swore I'd go, didn't you?

MRS. BUSTER. Yes, but they must be a way! — he *made* me swear. I had to! It was to git rid of him I done it.

RHODIE. [*sure of herself at last*] You swore — and on the Bible that kept Charley safe. And you cain't go back on that, can you? I'll go then. Don't worry, maw. Charley's safe, you're safe — you won't be killed.

MRS. BUSTER. [*turning away*] You've turned agin me now. I knowed you would. I always knowed you would. But mebbe I won't need help from you — mebbe — What air we goin' to tell Charley?

RHODIE. I? Tell him what you want to. He won't keer — he'll be glad. [*with fine scorn*] He'll think whut *you* think — as he always does. I leave him to you.

MRS. BUSTER. You — leave him to me?

[*There is a noise outside, and CHARLEY bursts into the room. He is dishevelled and excited.*]

CHARLEY. [*dramatically*] I got him!

MRS. BUSTER. You got him?

RHODIE. Charley!

MRS. BUSTER. Whut do you mean?

CHARLEY. He won't try a trick like that again!

MRS. BUSTER. You didn't —

CHARLEY. [*bragging*] Yes, I did.

RHODIE. [*She rushes to him, shakes him frantically.*] Charley! Whut have you done? It wasn't him! It wasn't him!

CHARLEY. [*shaking her off*] It was *him*, all right. Whut's the matter with you?

RHODIE. Oh! Whut've you done! [*starting toward the door*] Where is he? Tell me —

MRS. BUSTER. Whut's happened, Charley?

CHARLEY. Well, I went down to the barn and purty soon I heerd a noise a little ways down the crick. I slipped easy-like down there, and who do you suppose I saw?

MRS. BUSTER. Who?

CHARLEY. Earl Baker and that worthless cousin of his! [*RHODIE stops, relieved. She comes down, weakly, and sinks into the chair right of table.*] They was sittin' down by the old spring a-laughin' at the joke Earl played on me. It was Earl tried to grab my horse. He done it last night, too, the same way. When I seen 'em there a-laughin', I jumped out and lit in on him. I licked him good. He won't do sich a trick again. His cousin run away or I'd 'a' licked him too! [*He looks triumphantly from one to the other.*]

MRS. BUSTER. You licked him — you licked him, Charley? It was him — it was Earl Baker tried to hold you up?

CHARLEY. Yes, it was him.

MRS. BUSTER. Ye're shore?

CHARLEY. 'Course I'm shore! I heerd him sayin' so, I tell you. They ain't no doubt of it.

MRS. BUSTER. Oh! And I thought all the time —

CHARLEY. Whut did you think, Martha? Did you think some one else done it?

MRS. BUSTER. Yes.

CHARLEY. Who?

MRS. BUSTER. It don't matter now. I'm glad it's turned out this way. [*going to him*] Oh, Charley, I *am* glad! Only — Rhodie 'll hate me now.

RHODIE. Hate you?

MRS. BUSTER. You'll never forgive me fer it —

RHODIE. [*picking up her sewing basket from the table*] I won't even think of you. [*She goes toward the bedroom door, left, and turns.*] I won't even remember you and Charley a-slavin' here together. [*slowly, softly*] I'll be on the hills *he* told me about. I'll be with *him*! We won't never come back!

CURTAIN

ILE ¹

By Eugene O'Neill

CHARACTERS

BEN, *the cabin boy*
THE STEWARD
CAPTAIN KEENEY
SLOCUM, *second mate*
MRS. KEENEY
JOE, *a harpooner*

Members of the crew of the steam whaler "Atlantic Queen"

SCENE. CAPTAIN KEENEY'S cabin on board the steam whaling ship "Atlantic Queen" — a small, square compartment about eight feet high with a skylight in the center looking out on the poop deck. On the left (the stern of the ship) a long bench with rough cushions is built in against the wall. In front of the bench, a table. Over the bench, several curtained portholes.

In the rear, left, a door leading to the Captain's sleeping quarters. To the right of the door a small organ, looking as if it were brand new, is placed against the wall.

On the right, to the rear, a marble-topped sideboard. On the sideboard, a woman's sewing basket. Farther forward, a doorway leading to the companionway, and past the officer's quarters to the main deck.

In the center of the room, a stove. From the middle of

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the ceiling a hanging lamp is suspended. The walls of the cabin are painted white.

There is no rolling of the ship, and the light which comes through the skylight is sickly and faint, indicating one of those gray days of calm when ocean and sky are alike dead. The silence is unbroken except for the measured tread of some one walking up and down on the poop deck overhead.

It is nearing two bells — one o'clock — in the afternoon of a day in the year 1895.

At the rise of the curtain there is a moment of intense silence. Then the STEWARD enters and commences to clear the table of the few dishes which still remain on it after the CAPTAIN'S dinner. He is an old, grizzled man dressed in dungaree pants, a sweater, and a woolen cap with ear flaps. His manner is sullen and angry. He stops stacking up the plates and casts a quick glance upward at the skylight; then tiptoes over to the closed door in rear and listens with his ear pressed to the crack. What he hears makes his face darken and he mutters a furious curse. There is a noise from the doorway on the right, and he darts back to the table.

BEN enters. He is an overgrown, gawky boy with a long, pinched face. He is dressed in sweater, fur cap, etc. His teeth are chattering with the cold, and he hurries to the stove, where he stands for a moment shivering, blowing on his hands, slapping them against his sides, on the verge of crying.

THE STEWARD. [*in relieved tones — seeing who it is*] Oh, 'tis you, is it? What're ye shiverin' 'bout? Stay by the stove where ye belong and ye'll find no need of chatterin'.

BEN. It's c-c-cold. [*trying to control his chattering teeth — derisively*] Who d'ye think it were — the Old Man?

THE STEWARD. [*Makes a threatening move — BEN shrinks away.*] None o' your lip, young un, or I'll learn ye. [*more kindly*] Where was it ye've been all o' the time — the fo'e's'tle?

BEN. Yes.

THE STEWARD. Let the Old Man see ye up for'ard monkeyshinin' with the hands and ye'll get a hidin' ye'll not forget in a hurry.

BEN. Aw, he don't see nothin'. [*A trace of awe in his tones — he glances upward.*] He just walks up and down like he didn't notice nobody — and stares at the ice to the no'the'ard.

THE STEWARD. [*the same tone of awe creeping into his voice*] He's always starin' at the ice. [*in a sudden rage, shaking his fist at the skylight*] Ice, ice, ice! Damn him and damn the ice! Holdin' us in for nigh on a year — nothin' to see but ice — stuck in it like a fly in molasses!

BEN. [*apprehensively*] Sssh! He'll hear ye.

THE STEWARD. [*raging*] Aye, damn him, and damn the Arctic seas, and damn this stinkin' whalin' ship of his, and damn me for a fool to ever ship on it! [*subsiding as if realizing the uselessness of this outburst — shaking his head — slowly, with deep conviction*] He's a hard man — as hard a man as ever sailed the seas.

BEN. [*solemnly*] Aye.

THE STEWARD. The two years we all signed up for are done this day. Blessed Christ! Two years o' this dog's life, and no luck in the fishin', and the hands half-starved with the food runnin' low, rotten as it is; and not a sign of him turnin' back for home! [*bitterly*] Home! I begin to doubt if ever I'll set foot on land again. [*excitedly*] What is it he thinks he' goin' to do? Keep us all up here after our time is worked out till the last man of us is starved to death or frozen? We've grub enough hardly to last out the voyage back if we

started now. What are the men goin' to do 'bout it? Did ye hear any talk in the fo'c's'tle?

BEN. [*going over to him — in a half whisper*] They said if he don't put back south for home today they're goin' to mutiny.

THE STEWARD. [*with grim satisfaction*] Mutiny? Aye, 'tis the only thing they can do; and serve him right after the manner he's treated them — 's if they wern't no better nor dogs.

BEN. The ice is all broke up to s'uth'ard. They's clear water 's far 's you can see. He ain't got no excuse for not turnin' back for home, the men says.

THE STEWARD. [*bitterly*] He won't look nowheres but no'the'ard where they's only the ice to see. He don't want to see no clear water. All he thinks on is gittin' the ile — 's if it was our fault he ain't had good luck with the whales. [*shaking his head*] I think the man's nigh losin' his senses.

BEN. [*awed*] D'you really think he's crazy?

THE STEWARD. Aye, it's the punishment o' God on him. Did ye ever hear of a man who wasn't crazy do the things he does? [*pointing to the door in rear*] Who but a man that's mad would take his woman — and as sweet a woman as ever was — on a stinkin' whalin' ship to the Arctic seas to be locked in by the rotten ice for nigh on a year, and maybe lose her senses forever — for it's sure she'll never be the same again.

BEN. [*sadly*] She useter be awful nice to me before — [*his eyes grow wide and frightened*] she got — like she is.

THE STEWARD. Aye, she was good to all of us. 'Twould have been hell on board without her; for he's a hard man — a hard, hard man — a driver if there ever was one. [*with a grim laugh*] I hope he's satisfied now — drivin' her on till she's near lost her mind. And who could blame her? 'Tis a God's wonder we're not

a ship full of crazed people — with the damned ice all the time, and the quiet so thick you're afraid to hear your own voice.

BEN. [*with a frightened glance toward the door on right*] She don't never speak to me no more — jest looks at me 's if she didn't know me.

THE STEWARD. She don't know no one — but him. She talks to him — when she does talk — right enough.

BEN. She does nothin' all day long now but sit and sew — and then she cries to herself without makin' no noise. I've seen her.

THE STEWARD. Aye, I could hear her through the door a while back.

BEN. [*Tiptoes over to the door and listens.*] She's cryin' now.

THE STEWARD. [*furiously — shaking his fist*] God send his soul to hell for the devil he is!

[*There is the noise of some one coming slowly down the companionway stairs. The STEWARD hurries to his stacked-up dishes. He is so nervous from fright that he knocks off the top one, which falls and breaks on the floor. He stands aghast, trembling with dread. BEN is violently rubbing off the organ with a piece of cloth which he has snatched from his pocket. CAPTAIN KEENEY appears in the doorway on right and comes into the cabin, removing his fur cap as he does so. He is a man of about forty, around five-ten in height but looking much shorter on account of the enormous proportions of his shoulders and chest. His face is massive and deeply lined, with gray-blue eyes of a bleak hardness, and a tightly clenched, thin-lipped mouth. His thick hair is long and gray. He is dressed in a heavy blue jacket and blue pants stuffed into his seaboots.*]

[*He is followed into the cabin by the SECOND MATE, a rangy six-footer with a lean weather-beaten face. The MATE is dressed about the same as the captain. He is a man of thirty or so.*]

KEENEY. [*Comes toward the STEWARD — with a stern look on his face. The STEWARD is visibly frightened and the stack of dishes rattles in his trembling hands. KEENEY draws back his fist and the STEWARD shrinks away. The fist is gradually lowered and KEENEY speaks slowly.*] 'Twould be like hitting a worm. It is nigh on two bells, Mr. Steward, and this truck not cleared yet.

THE STEWARD. [*stammering*] Y-y-yes, sir.

KEENEY. Instead of doin' your rightful work ye've been below here gossipin' old woman's talk with that boy. [*to BEN, fiercely*] Get out o' this, you! Clean up the chart room. [*BEN darts past the MATE to the open doorway.*] Pick up that dish, Mr. Steward!

THE STEWARD. [*doing so with difficulty*] Yes, sir.

KEENEY. The next dish you break, Mr. Steward, you take a bath in the Bering Sea at the end of a rope.

THE STEWARD. [*tremblingly*] Yes, sir. [*He hurries out. The SECOND MATE walks slowly over to the Captain.*]

MATE. I warn't 'specially anxious the man at the wheel should catch what I wanted to say to you, sir. That's why I asked you to come below.

KEENEY. [*impatiently*] Speak your say, Mr. Slocum.

MATE. [*unconsciously lowering his voice*] I'm afeard there'll be trouble with the hands by the look o' things. They'll likely turn ugly, every blessed one o' them, if you don't put back. Their two years they signed up for is up today.

KEENEY. And d'you think you're tellin' me some-thin' new, Mr. Slocum? I've felt it in the air this

long time past. D'you think I've not seen their ugly looks and the grudgin' way they worked?

[*The door in rear is opened and MRS. KEENEY stands in the doorway. She is a slight, sweet-faced little woman primly dressed in black. Her eyes are red from weeping and her face drawn and pale. She takes in the cabin with a frightened glance and stands as if fixed to the spot by some nameless dread, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. The two men turn and look at her.*]

KEENEY. [*with rough tenderness*] Well, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY. [*as if awakening from a dream*] David, I — [*She is silent. The MATE starts for the doorway.*]

KEENEY. [*turning to him — sharply*] Wait!

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. D'you want anything, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY. [*after a pause, during which she seems to be endeavoring to collect her thoughts*] I thought maybe — I'd go up on deck, David, to get a breath of fresh air. [*She stands humbly awaiting his permission. He and the MATE exchange a significant glance.*]

KEENEY. It's too cold, Annie. You'd best stay below today. There's nothing to look at on deck — but ice.

MRS. KEENEY. [*monotonously*] I know — ice, ice, ice! But there's nothing to see down here but these walls. [*She makes a gesture of loathing.*]

KEENEY. You can play the organ, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. [*dully*] I hate the organ. It puts me in mind of home.

KEENEY. [*a touch of resentment in his voice*] I got it jest for you.

MRS. KEENEY. [*dully*] I know. [*She turns away from them and walks slowly to the bench on left. She lifts*

up one of the curtains and looks through a porthole; then utters an exclamation of joy.] Ah, water! Clear water! As far as I can see! How good it looks after all these months of ice! *[She turns round to them, her face transfigured with joy.]* Ah, now I must go up on deck and look at it, David.

KEENEY. *[frowning]* Best not today, Annie. Best wait for a day when the sun shines.

MRS. KEENEY. *[desperately]* But the sun never shines in this terrible place.

KEENEY. *[a tone of command in his voice]* Best not today, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. *[crumbling before this command — abjectly]* Very well, David. *[She stands there staring straight before her as if in a daze. The two men look at her uneasily.]*

KEENEY. *[sharply]* Annie!

MRS. KEENEY. *[dully]* Yes, David.

KEENEY. Me and Mr. Slocum has business to talk about — ship's business.

MRS. KEENEY. Very well, David. *[She goes slowly out, rear, and leaves the door three-quarters shut behind her.]*

KEENEY. Best not have her on deck if they's goin' to be any trouble.

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. And trouble they's goin' to be. I feel it in my bones. *[Takes a revolver from the pocket of his coat and examines it.]* Got your'n?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. Not that we'll have to use 'em — not if I know their breed of dog — jest to frighten 'em up a bit. *[grimly]* I ain't never been forced to use one yit; and trouble I've had by land and by sea 's long as I kin remember, and will have till my dyin' day, I reckon,

MATE. [*hesitatingly*] Then you ain't goin' — to turn back?

KEENEY. Turn back! Mr. Slocum, did you ever hear 'o me pointin' s'uth for home with only a measly four hundred barrel of ile in the hold?

MATE. [*hastily*] No, sir — but the grub's gittin' low.

KEENEY. They's enough to last a long time yit, if they're careful with it; and they's plenty o' water.

MATE. They say it's not fit to eat — what's left; and the two years they signed on fur is up today. They might make trouble for you in the courts when we git home.

KEENEY. To hell with 'em! Let them make what law trouble they kin. I don't give a damn 'bout the money. I've got to git the ile! [*glancing sharply at the MATE*] You ain't turnin' no damned sea lawyer, be you, Mr. Slocum?

MATE. [*flushing*] Not by a hell of a sight, sir.

KEENEY. What do the fools want to go home fur now? Their share o' the four hundred barrel wouldn't keep 'em in chewin' terbacco.

MATE. [*slowly*] They wants to git back to their folks an' things, I s'pose.

KEENEY. [*looking at him searchingly*] 'N you want to turn back, too. [*The MATE looks down confusedly before his sharp gaze.*] Don't lie, Mr. Slocum. It's writ down plain in your eyes. [*with grim sarcasm*] I hope, Mr. Slocum, you ain't agoin' to jine the men agin me.

MATE. [*indignantly*] That ain't fair, sir, to say sich things.

KEENEY. [*with satisfaction*] I warn't much afeard o' that, Tom. You been with me nigh on ten year and I've learned ye whalin'. No man kin say I ain't a good master, if I be a hard one.

MATE. I warn't thinkin' of myself, sir — 'bout turnin' home, I mean. [*desperately*] But Mrs. Keeney, sir — seems like she ain't jest satisfied up here, ailin' like — what with the cold an' bad luck an' the ice an' all.

KEENEY. [*his face clouding — rebukingly but not severely*] That's my business, Mr. Slocum. I'll thank you to steer a clear course o' that. [*a pause*] The ice'll break up soon to no'th'ard. I could see it startin' to-day. And when it goes an' we git some sun Annie'll perk up. [*Another pause — then he bursts forth.*] It ain't the damned money what's keepin' me up in the northern seas, Tom. But I can't go back to Homeport with a measly four hundred barrel of ile. I'd die fust. I ain't never come back home in all my days without a full ship. Ain't that truth?

MATE. Yes, sir; but this voyage you been icebound, an' —

KEENEY. [*scornfully*] And d'you s'pose any of 'em would believe that — any o' them skippers I've beaten voyage after voyage? Can't you hear 'em laughin' and sneerin' — Tibbots 'n' Harris 'n' Simms and the rest — and all o' Homeport makin' fun o' me? “Dave Keeney what boasts he's the best whalin' skipper out o' Homeport comin' back with a measly four hundred barrel of ile?” [*The thought of this drives him into a frenzy, and he smashes his fist down on the marble top of the sideboard.*] Hell! I got to git the ile, I tell you. How could I figger on this ice? It's never been so bad before in the thirty year I been a-comin' here. And now it's breakin' up. In a couple o' days it'll be all gone. And they's whale here, plenty of 'em. I know they is and I ain't never gone wrong yit. I got to git the ile! I got to git it in spite of all hell, and by God, I ain't agoin' home till I do git it! [*There is the sound of subdued sobbing from*

the door in rear. The two men stand silent for a moment, listening. Then KEENEY goes over to the door and looks in. He hesitates for a moment as if he were going to enter — then closes the door softly. JOE, the harpooner, an enormous six-footer with a battered, ugly face, enters from right and stands waiting for the captain to notice him.]

KEENEY. [*turning and seeing him*] Don't be standin' there like a gawk, Harpooner. Speak up!

JOE. [*confusedly*] We want — the men, sir — they wants to send a depitation aft to have a word with you.

KEENEY. [*furiously*] Tell 'em to go to — [*checks himself and continues grimly*] Tell 'em to come. I'll see 'em.

JOE. Aye, aye, sir. [*He goes out.*]

KEENEY. [*with a grim smile*] Here it comes, the trouble you spoke of, Mr. Slocum, and we'll make short shift of it. It's better to crush such things at the start than let them make headway.

MATE. [*worriedly*] Shall I wake up the First and Fourth, sir? We might need their help.

KEENEY. No, let them sleep. I'm well able to handle this alone, Mr. Slocum. [*There is the shuffling of footsteps from outside and five of the crew crowd into the cabin, led by JOE. All are dressed alike — sweaters, seaboots, etc. They glance uneasily at the CAPTAIN, twirling their fur caps in their hands.*]

KEENEY. [*after a pause*] Well? Who's to speak fur ye?

JOE. [*stepping forward with an air of bravado*] I be.

KEENEY. [*eyeing him up and down coldly*] So you be. Then speak your say and be quick about it.

JOE. [*trying not to wilt before the CAPTAIN's glance and avoiding his eyes*] The time we signed up for is done today.

KEENEY. [*icily*] You're tellin' me nothin' I don't know.

JOE. You ain't pintin' fur home yit, far 's we kin see.

KEENEY. No, and I ain't agoin' to till this ship is full of ile.

JOE. You can't go no further no'the with the ice afore ye.

KEENEY. The ice is breaking up.

JOE. [*after a slight pause during which the others mumble angrily to one another*] The grub we're gittin' now is rotten.

KEENEY. It's good enough fur ye. Better men than ye are have eaten worse. [*There is a chorus of angry exclamations from the crowd.*]

JOE. [*encouraged by this support*] We ain't a-goin' to work no more 'less you puts back for home.

KEENEY. [*fiercely*] You ain't, ain't you?

JOE. No; and the law courts'll say we was right.

KEENEY. To hell with your law courts! We're at sea now and I'm the law on this ship. [*edging up toward the harpooner*] And every mother's son of you what don't obey orders goes in irons. [*There are more angry exclamations from the crew. MRS. KEENEY appears in the doorway in rear and looks on with startled eyes. None of the men notice her.*]

JOE. [*with bravado*] Then we're agoin' to mutiny and take the old hooker home ourselves. Ain't we, boys? [*As he turns his head to look at the others, KEENEY'S fist shoots out to the side of his jaw. JOE goes down in a heap and lies there. MRS. KEENEY gives a shriek and hides her face in her hands. The men pull out their sheath knives and start a rush, but stop when they find themselves confronted by the revolvers of KEENEY and the MATE.*]

KEENEY. [*his eyes and voice snapping*] Hold still! [*The men stand huddled together in a sullen silence. KEENEY'S voice is full of mockery.*] You've found out it ain't safe to mutiny on this ship, ain't you? And now git for'ard where ye belong, and — [*He gives JOE'S body a contemptuous kick.*] Drag him with you. And remember the first man of ye I see shirkin' I'll shoot dead as sure as there's a sea under us, and you can tell the rest the same. Git for'ard now! Quick! [*The men leave in cowed silence, carrying JOE with them. KEENEY turns to the MATE with a short laugh and puts his revolver back in his pocket.*] Best get up on deck, Mr. Slocum, and see to it they don't try none of their skulkin' tricks. We'll have to keep an eye peeled from now on. I know 'em.

MATE. Yes, sir. [*He goes out, right. KEENEY hears his wife's hysterical weeping and turns around in surprise — then walks slowly to her side.*]

KEENEY. [*Putting an arm around her shoulder — with gruff tenderness.*] There, there, Annie. Don't be afeard. It's all past and gone.

MRS. KEENEY. [*shrinking away from him*] Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it any longer!

KEENEY. [*gently*] Can't bear what, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY. [*hysterically*] All this horrible brutality, and these brutes of men, and this terrible ship, and this prison cell of a room, and the ice all around, and the silence. [*After this outburst she calms down and wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*]

KEENEY. [*after a pause during which he looks down at her with a puzzled frown*] Remember, I warn't hankerin' to have you come on this voyage, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. I wanted to be with you, David, don't you see? I didn't want to wait back there in the house all alone as I've been doing these last six years

since we were married — waiting, and watching, and fearing — with nothing to keep my mind occupied — not able to go back teaching school on account of being Dave Keeney's wife. I used to dream of sailing on the great, wide, glorious ocean. I wanted to be by your side in the danger and vigorous life of it all. I wanted to see you the hero they make you out to be in Homeport. And instead — [*Her voice grows tremulous.*] All I find is ice and cold — and brutality! [*Her voice breaks.*]

KEENEY. I warned you what it'd be, Annie. "Whal-in' ain't no ladies' tea party," I says to you, and "you better stay to home where you've got all your woman's comforts." [*shaking his head*] But you was so set on it.

MRS. KEENEY. [*wearily*] Oh, I know it isn't your fault, David. You see, I didn't believe you. I guess I was dreaming about the old Vikings in the story books and I thought you were one of them.

KEENEY. [*protestingly*] I done my best to make it as cozy and comfortable as could be. [*MRS. KEENEY looks around her in wild scorn.*] I even sent to the city for that organ for ye, thinkin' it might be soothin' to ye to be playin' it times when they was calms and things was dull like.

MRS. KEENEY. [*wearily*] Yes, you were very kind, David. I know that. [*She goes to left and lifts the curtains from the porthole and looks out — then suddenly bursts forth.*] I won't stand it — I can't stand it — pent up by these walls like a prisoner. [*She runs over to him and throws her arms around him, weeping. He puts his arm protectingly over her shoulders.*] Take me away from here, David! If I don't get away from here, out of this terrible ship, I'll go mad! Take me home, David! I can't think any more. I feel as if the

cold and the silence were crushing down on my brain. I'm afraid. Take me home!

KEENEY. [*Holds her at arm's length and looks at her face anxiously.*] Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't yourself. You got fever. Your eyes look so strange like. I ain't never seen you look this way before.

MRS. KEENEY. [*laughing hysterically*] It's the ice and the cold and the silence — they'd make any one look strange.

KEENEY. [*soothingly*] In a month or two, with good luck, three at the most, I'll have her filled with ile and then we'll give her everything she'll stand and pint for home.

MRS. KEENEY. But we can't wait for that — I can't wait. I want to get home. And the men won't wait. They want to get home. It's cruel, it's brutal for you to keep them. You must sail back. You've got no excuse. There's clear water to the south now. If you've a heart at all you've got to turn back.

KEENEY. [*harshly*] I can't, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. Why can't you?

KEENEY. A woman couldn't rightly understand my reason.

MRS. KEENEY. [*wildly*] Because it's a stupid, stubborn reason. Oh, I heard you talking with the Second Mate. You're afraid the other captains will sneer at you because you didn't come back with a full ship. You want to live up to your silly reputation even if you do have to beat and starve men and drive me mad to do it.

KEENEY. [*his jaw set stubbornly*] It ain't that, Annie. Them skippers would never dare sneer to my face. It ain't so much what any one'd say — but — [*He hesitates, struggling to express his meaning.*] You see — I've always done it — since my first voyage as skipper.

I always come back — with a full ship — and — it don't seem right not to — somehow. I been always first whalin' skipper out o' Homeport, and — Don't you see my meanin', Annie? [*He glances at her. She is not looking at him but staring dully in front of her, not hearing a word he is saying.*] Annie! [*She comes to herself with a start.*] Best turn in, Annie, there's a good woman. You ain't well.

MRS. KEENEY. [*resisting his attempts to guide her to the door in rear*] David! Won't you please turn back?

KEENEY. [*gently*] I can't, Annie — not yet awhile. You don't see my meanin'. I got to git the ile.

MRS. KEENEY. It'd be different if you needed the money, but you don't. You've got more than plenty.

KEENEY. [*impatiently*] It ain't the money I'm thinkin' of. D'you think I'm as mean as that?

MRS. KEENEY. [*dully*] No — I don't know — I can't understand — [*intensely*] Oh, I want to be home in the old house once more and see my own kitchen again, and hear a woman's voice talking to me and be able to talk to her. Two years! It seems so long ago — as if I'd been dead and could never go back.

KEENEY. [*worried by her strange tone and the far-away look in her eyes*] Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't well.

MRS. KEENEY. [*not appearing to hear him*] I used to be lonely when you were away. I used to think Homeport was a stupid, monotonous place. Then I used to go down on the beach, especially when it was windy and the breakers were rolling in, and I'd dream of the fine free life you must be leading. [*She gives a laugh which is half a sob.*] I used to love the sea then. [*She pauses; then continues with slow intensity.*] But now — I don't ever want to see the sea again.

KEENEY. [*thinking to humor her*] 'Tis no fit place for a woman, that's sure. I was a fool to bring ye.

MRS. KEENEY. [*after a pause — passing her hand over her eyes with a gesture of pathetic weariness*] How long would it take us to reach home — if we started now?

KEENEY. [*frowning*] 'Bout two months, I reckon, Annie, with fair luck.

MRS. KEENEY. [*Counts on her fingers — then murmurs with a rapt smile.*] That would be August, the latter part of August, wouldn't it? It was on the twenty-fifth of August we were married, David, wasn't it?

KEENEY. [*trying to conceal the fact that her memories have moved him — gruffly*] Don't you remember?

MRS. KEENEY. [*vaguely — again passes her hand over her eyes*] My memory is leaving me — up here in the ice. It was so long ago. [*A pause — then she smiles dreamily.*] It's June now. The lilacs will be all in bloom in the front yard — and the climbing roses on the trellis to the side of the house — they're budding. [*She suddenly covers her face with her hands and commences to sob.*]

KEENEY. [*disturbed*] Go in and rest, Annie. You're all wore out cryin' over what can't be helped.

MRS. KEENEY. [*suddenly throwing her arms around his neck and clinging to him*] You love me, don't you, David?

KEENEY. [*in amazed embarrassment at this outburst*] Love you? Why d'you ask me such a question, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY. [*shaking him — fiercely*] But you do, don't you, David? Tell me!

KEENEY. I'm your husband, Annie, and you're my wife. Could there be aught but love between us after all these years?

MRS. KEENEY. [*shaking him again — still more fiercely*] Then you do love me. Say it!

KEENEY. [*simply*] I do, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. [*Gives a sigh of relief — her hands drop to her sides. KEENEY regards her anxiously. She passes her hand across her eyes and murmurs half to herself:*] I sometimes think if we could only have had a child. [*KEENEY turns away from her, deeply moved. She grabs his arm and turns him around to face her — intensely.*] And I've always been a good wife to you, haven't I, David?

KEENEY. [*his voice betraying his emotion*] No man has ever had a better, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. And I've never asked for much from you, have I, David? Have I?

KEENEY. You know you could have all I got the power to give ye, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. [*wildly*] Then do this this once for my sake, for God's sake — take me home! It's killing me, this life — the brutality and cold and horror of it. I'm going mad. I can feel the threat in the air. I can hear the silence threatening me — day after gray day and every day the same. I can't bear it. [*sobbing*] I'll go mad, I know I will. Take me home, David, if you love me as you say. I'm afraid. For the love of God, take me home! [*She throws her arms around him, weeping against his shoulder. His face betrays the tremendous struggle going on within him. He holds her out at arm's length, his expression softening. For a moment his shoulders sag, he becomes old, his iron spirit weakens as he looks at her tear-stained face.*]

KEENEY. [*dragging out the words with an effort*] I'll do it, Annie — for your sake — if you say it's needful for ye.

MRS. KEENEY. [*with wild joy — kissing him*] God

bless you for that, David! [*He turns away from her silently and walks toward the companionway. Just at that moment there is a clatter of footsteps on the stairs and the SECOND MATE enters the cabin.*]

MATE. [*excitedly*] The ice is breakin' up to no'the'ard, sir. There's a clear passage through the floe, and clear water beyond, the lookout says. [KEENEY *straightens himself like a man coming out of a trance.* MRS. KEENEY *looks at the MATE with terrified eyes.*]

KEENEY. [*dazedly — trying to collect his thoughts*] A clear passage? To no'the'ard?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. [*his voice suddenly grim with determination*] Then get her ready and we'll drive her through.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir.

MRS. KEENEY. [*appealingly*] David!

KEENEY. [*not heeding her*] Will the men turn to willin' or must we drag 'em out?

MATE. They'll turn to willin' enough. You put the fear o' God into 'em, sir. They're meek as lambs.

KEENEY. Then drive 'em — both watches. [*with grim determination*] They's whale t'other side o' this floe and we're going to git 'em.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir. [*He goes out hurriedly. A moment later there is the sound of scuffling feet from the deck outside and the MATE's voice shouting orders.*]

KEENEY. [*speaking aloud to himself — derisively*] And I was a-goin' home like a yaller dog!

MRS. KEENEY. [*imploringly*] David!

KEENEY. [*sternly*] Woman, you ain't a-doin' right when you meddle in men's business and weaken 'em. You can't know my feelin's. I got to prove a man to be a good husband for ye to take pride in. I got to git the ile, I tell ye.

MRS. KEENEY. [*supplicatingly*] David! Aren't you going home?

KEENEY. [*ignoring this question — commandingly*] You ain't well. Go and lay down a mite. [*He starts for the door.*] I got to git on deck. [*He goes out. She cries after him in anguish.*] David! [*A pause. She passes her hand across her eyes — then commences to laugh hysterically and goes to the organ. She sits down and starts to play wildly an old hymn. KEENEY reënters from the doorway to the deck and stands looking at her angrily. He comes over and grabs her roughly by the shoulder.*]

KEENEY. Woman, what foolish mockin' is this? [*She laughs wildly, and he starts back from her in alarm.*] Annie! What is it? [*She doesn't answer him. KEENEY's voice trembles.*] Don't you know me, Annie? [*He puts both hands on her shoulders and turns her around so that he can look into her eyes. She stares up at him with a stupid expression, a vague smile on her lips. He stumbles away from her, and she commences softly to play the organ again.*]

KEENEY. [*swallowing hard — in a hoarse whisper, as if he had difficulty in speaking*] You said — you was a-goin' mad — God! [*A long wail is heard from the deck above.*] Ah bl-o-o-o-ow! [*A moment later the MATE's face appears through the skylight. He cannot see MRS. KEENEY.*]

MATE [*in great excitement*] Whales, sir — a whole school of 'em — off the star'b'd quarter 'bout five mile away — big ones!

KEENEY. [*galvanized into action*] Are you lowerin' the boats?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. [*with grim decision*] I'm a-comin' with ye.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir. [*jubilantly*] You'll git the ile now right enough, sir. [*His head is withdrawn and he can be heard shouting orders.*]

KEENEY. [*turning to his wife*] Annie! Did you hear him? I'll git the ile. [*She doesn't answer or seem to know he is there. He gives a hard laugh, which is almost a groan.*] I know you're foolin' me, Annie. You ain't out of your mind — [*anxiously*] be you? I'll git the ile now right enough — jest a little while longer, Annie — then we'll turn home'ard. I can't turn back now, you see that, don't ye? I've got to git the ile. [*in sudden terror*] Answer me! You ain't mad, be you? [*She keeps on playing the organ, but makes no reply. The MATE's face appears again through the skylight.*]

MATE. All ready, sir. [*KEENEY turns his back on his wife and strides to the doorway, where he stands for a moment and looks back at her in anguish, fighting to control his feelings.*]

MATE. Comin', sir?

KEENEY. [*His face suddenly grown hard with determination.*] Aye. [*He turns abruptly and goes out. MRS. KEENEY does not appear to notice his departure. Her whole attention seems centered in the organ. She sits with half-closed eyes, her body swaying a little from side to side to the rhythm of the hymn. Her fingers move faster and faster and she is playing wildly and discordantly as*

[THE CURTAIN FALLS]

SAVED ¹

By John William Rogers

CHARACTERS

MISS MINNIE TREMAINE

MISS EMILY TREMAINE, *her sister*

MRS. SAUNDERS

MRS. BOSTICK

MISS ZILLA BIRDSONG

SUE TREMAINE, *niece of Misses Minnie
and Emily*

SCENE. The sitting room of the Misses Tremaine, in a small town of the Old South.

TIME. The present.

The sitting room of the MISSES TREMAINE. A quaint-looking old room full of some handsome early Victorian furniture with one or two really fine antique pieces — heir-looms in the TREMAINE family. The room would be homelike but for a certain immaculate primness that suggests a too frequent acquaintance with the broom and duster for the general comfort of whatever family has to use it.

It is evident the MISSES TREMAINE are famous for being "good housekeepers," and even an afternoon during which half a dozen members of "The King's Daughters" have been there sewing buttons and buttonholes on mis-

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sionary dresses, has failed to interfere with the "swept and garnished" stiffness of the place.

When the play begins MISSES MINNIE and EMILY TREMAINE, MRS. BOSTICK, MISS ZILLA BIRDSONG, and MRS. SAUNDERS are seated about the room, busy sewing and talking. MRS. SAUNDERS is seated at the center of the stage near the footlights, her right foot propped up on a stool, evidently injured. As the curtain rises she is speaking.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Well, there she was with three dozen glasses of grape jelly that wouldn't have jelled if she'd set 'em under the North Pole for a week. Being a bride, she was awfully upset and had been crying. "It's lemons you need now, child, not tears," I said to her. And in five minutes we had the stuff back on the stove cooking.

MRS. BOSTICK. Grapes too ripe, I reckon. I always was afraid of grape jelly myself.

MISS EMILY. Speaking of grapes, Mrs. Saunders, that was a fine sermon Dr. Saunders preached last Sunday on that text from "Isaiah" about "The wine-press therein bringing forth wild grapes."

MRS. BOSTICK. Yes, wasn't it now? I declare, Mrs. Saunders, when Brother Saunders gets started, I just rare back and listen and forget everything else in this world. I don't think we ever did have a preacher so plumb full of eloquence.

MISS ZILLA. I haven't missed church but two Sunday mornings in the whole three years you've been here.

MRS. BOSTICK. It must make you mighty proud, sometimes, to be married to a man like that!

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*laughing*] Yes, it does — sometimes — Mrs. Bostick.

[MISS MINNIE, *who has given evidence of impatience since the rise of the curtain, gets up and goes to the window, looking down the street.*]

MISS EMILY. What is it, Sister Minnie?

MISS MINNIE. I'm looking for Sue. I asked her to try and get back early today.

MISS EMILY. Oh, she'll be along soon. Something's probably kept her at school.

[MISS MINNIE *continues to look out of the window as though reluctant to go back to her work until she gets a sight of SUE returning.*]

MISS ZILLA. How is Miss Sue? She loves to teach, doesn't she?

MISS EMILY. Sue's always been crazy about children since she was a little thing.

MRS. BOSTICK. Some girls are that way.

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*smoothing out the child's plain dress on which she has been sewing a buttonhole*] Well, now this one's finished. That was the last buttonhole. [*Holding out the dress at arm's length, she surveys it thoughtfully.*] I wonder what poor little mountain child is going to wear it? I think you more than get paid working on missionary things like this, just wondering and imagining all the strange places they're going to and the lives they're going to help that you'll never know. Even if you can't go traveling off to China and Africa, you can sort of send part of yourself in work like this. I never did know anything that had more real romance to it than getting up a missionary box.

MRS. BOSTICK. Law, Mrs. Saunders, you have got imagination! I never would have thought of it like that.

MISS ZILLA. I think it's such a nice way to look at it.

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*folding the garment up and making a move to get up*] Where's another one?

MISS EMILY. [*vigorously, rising and coming to her*] No, don't you get up now. [*motioning MRS. SAUNDERS back into the chair*] The others are all done. I'll take that. I do wish you had let me bathe your ankle. [*starting to lay the finished dress over with a pile of others*]

MRS. SAUNDERS. Pshaw, it's nothing, Miss Emily. I feel absurd sitting like this with my foot all propped up. I only did it to humor Miss Minnie.

MISS ZILLA. You really ought to have let us bathe it when you first fell, Mrs. Saunders.

MRS. SAUNDERS. But it was just a little twist.

MISS ZILLA. Mrs. Bostick and I were coming down the street about half a block behind you. I saw you turn in at Miss Minnie's gate. Then I must have said something to Mrs. Bostick. I looked up again just after you'd fallen down, and I couldn't think what had become of you.

[MISS MINNIE rises and goes to window, looking out again.]

MRS. BOSTICK. Yes, I said to Zilla, "Why, where is she? She was there a moment ago."

MISS ZILLA. And then we saw you trying to get up.

MISS MINNIE. That loose brick? It was one just inside the gate, you said?

MRS. SAUNDERS. Yes, just inside. I think I caught my heel. You'll be thinking I've really sprained my ankle.

MISS MINNIE. [*more to herself*] I didn't know any of those bricks were loose.

MISS EMILY. Now, sister, don't go fretting about Sue. Everything's all fixed and we don't need her. [*to the group*] If you ladies will excuse me a few minutes — [*She goes out.*]

MISS MINNIE. [*following her*] I'd better help you.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Miss Emily's a wonderful home-body. I don't believe there ever was a better cook.

MISS ZILLA. Yes, some man missed a mighty fine wife.

MRS. BOSTICK. [*looking to see if Miss Emily has gone*] Well, it wasn't for the want of one man trying to get her.

MISS ZILLA. You mean —?

MRS. BOSTICK. Frank Ellis.

MISS ZILLA. It seems to me I remember something about that — hearing a lot of talk when I was a girl growing up.

MRS. BOSTICK. There was plenty of talk, all right, about Miss Minnie breaking off the match. Everybody said she couldn't do it, but when Miss Minnie gets her head set — she did, and as things turned out, I reckon it was best for Miss Emily after all.

MISS ZILLA. He's dead, isn't he?

MRS. BOSTICK. Law, Frank Ellis has been dead fifteen years. They say he died raving in one of those hospitals they used to have for drunkards.

MISS ZILLA. Maybe if she'd a married him, he wouldn't have been a drunkard.

MRS. BOSTICK. Now, Miss Zilla, you don't know men. Does she, Mrs. Saunders? That old talk about a reformed rake was got up by one of them that was trying to get a girl to marry him.

[*MISS MINNIE comes through the door with napkins.*]

MISS ZILLA. [*rising*] Let me pass those, Miss Minnie.

MISS MINNIE. [*handing her the napkins*] Thanks. [*pointing to the table by the window*] Just clear that table for the tea things, will you?

MRS. BOSTICK. [*rising*] Can I help?

MISS MINNIE. [*going out*] No, thank you, everything's ready.

MRS. BOSTICK. [*going over and laying her dress on the sofa, then coming to the seat near MRS. SAUNDERS. She looks around to make sure MISS MINNIE is out of hearing and speaks in a lowered voice.*] Miss Emily would have certainly married Frank if it hadn't been for Miss Minnie. But time does change us. More'n likely Miss Em' thanks her stars every night Miss Minnie saved her from making that bed to lie on.

[*MISS EMILY enters, carrying a tray filled with tea things which she sets down on the table, and begins to serve, pouring tea.*]

MRS. BOSTICK. [*At a warning sign from MRS. SAUNDERS, as MISS EMILY enters. She speaks with a forced affability, which is the result of a guilty sense of talking too freely about some one while a guest in her house.*] I thought I smelled some of your gingerbread as soon as I came in this house. I got your recipe from Miss Minnie, but I think she left something out to fool me.

[*MISS ZILLA stays by tea table and carries tea as it is ready.*]

MISS EMILY. How will you have your tea, Mrs. Saunders, one or two lumps?

MRS. SAUNDERS. One, please.

MISS EMILY. And cream, or lemon?

MRS. SAUNDERS. Cream, please. There isn't anybody can make gingerbread or sunshine cake like you.

MISS ZILLA. Oh, Miss Em', I've been wanting the longest time to get your recipe for sunshine cake. Will you give it to me?

MISS EMILY. [*to MRS. BOSTICK*] Cream or lemon, Ada?

MRS. BOSTICK. Give me cream. [*MISS MINNIE enters with a plate of cake, which she passes to MRS.*

BOSTICK *and* MRS. SAUNDERS.] I never did like that new-fangled notion of putting lemon in tea. It spoils it. Must have come from one of those heathen countries!

MISS MINNIE. [*acidly*] Well, I always liked lemon in my tea, and I'm not a heathen, either.

MRS. BOSTICK. [*laughing*] No, Miss Minnie, but you always was a powerful body to have your own notions about things.

[MISS EMILY *serves* MISS ZILLA, MISS MINNIE, *and* herself, *as expeditely as is natural*. MISS ZILLA *seats herself on sofa* *and* MISS MINNIE *in rocker at right of stage*.]

MISS EMILY. [*as the noise of a door slamming is heard*] You've been worrying about Sue, sister. There she comes now.

[*As soon as every one has tea, SUE enters, to be met with the usual greeting. She has a bundle of school papers under her arm. She is agitated about something, but trying to conceal it.*]

SUE. [*entering*] Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Mrs. Bostick, Mrs. Saunders, Auntie. I'm sorry I'm late. Am I too late to help?

MISS MINNIE. What made you so late?

SUE. [*rather lamely and as though covering embarrassment*] Oh — er — you know how it always is when you plan — Well, I'm here now anyway, Auntie. Can I get anything for anybody?

MISS EMILY. Nothing, dear.

MISS MINNIE. Hand Mrs. Saunders that gingerbread; she's sprained her ankle.

[SUE *picks up the plate, but sets it down again with a slight start at* MRS. BOSTICK's words.]

MRS. BOSTICK. She sprained it as she turned in your walk — on a brick.

SUE. [*sharply*] Brick? Which brick?

MISS MINNIE. What a question! On a loose brick in the walk.

SUE. [*trying to cover her confusion, picking up the plate and offering it to MRS. SAUNDERS*] Of course. I meant to say, I'm sorry.

MRS. SAUNDERS. It's nothing at all, Miss Sue. No, thank you.

[*SUE also offers cake to MRS. BOSTICK, who takes it out of her hand and sets it down on the table beside her, helping herself to a piece of it greedily.*]

MISS EMILY. [*to SUE*] I didn't bring a cup for you. Get one.

SUE. [*a look of worry crossing her face*] I don't believe I want anything just now.

MISS MINNIE. [*eyeing her*] You're usually hungry enough when you get home.

SUE. [*forcing a lighter air*] Oh, I'll take something then. I'll go and lay off my things. [*She goes out left.*]

MRS. BOSTICK. [*to MISS MINNIE*] I don't suppose Sue sees much of Carter Oakes these days. He's back in town a good deal this summer, I hear.

MISS MINNIE. [*disapprovingly*] There is no reason for her to see anything of Carter Oakes.

MRS. BOSTICK. Well, there was a time — law, the way that boy made calf's eyes at Sue when they were in high school. And if you ask me, I always did think Sue was a little mite —

MISS MINNIE. [*slightly irritated with MRS. BOSTICK's persistence*] Whatever notion Sue may have had when she was a schoolgirl, she has more sense now.

MRS. BOSTICK. Well, Carter always was a good-looking, clean-appearing boy, and that does a heap to addle sense where girls are concerned.

MISS MINNIE. Good looks wear mighty poorly when you have to look at them three times a day.

MRS. BOSTICK. He's likely to do as well as any of 'em before he gets through. If I was Sue, and Carter looked at me —

MISS MINNIE. [*frigidly*] You force me to remind you — Carter Oakes's grandfather came to this country as my father's overseer.

MRS. BOSTICK. Miss Minnie, you're awful proud, I know. But young things will be young things, in spite of grandfathers. [*wisely*] At least, they used to be in my day.

MISS MINNIE. Well, Sue's not interested in Carter Oakes. You'll have to go somewhere else for your matchmaking, Ada Bostick.

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*hoping to change the subject to more pleasant ground*] That young Mr. Oakes is an inventor, isn't he?

MISS ZILLA. I heard he was traveling with a circus.

MRS. BOSTICK. It ain't a circus. He goes about with fairs and carnivals and things, selling some sort of knife he's invented for cutting up vegetables. One of those knives that you can fix carrots with and make them look like tube roses, and peel fried potatoes like lover's knots.

MISS ZILLA. Oh, my cousin Laura Thompson had one of that kind once. They make vegetables real pretty.

MISS MINNIE. I should think they would be a lot of trouble to fix that way just for every day.

MRS. BOSTICK. They say Carter makes good money selling 'em.

MISS MINNIE. [*sniffing*] Who says so? His mother? Peddling knives at fairs! Mighty poor business, I should say.

MRS. BOSTICK. He has big ideas. Some day he says he's going to have his own factory.

MISS MINNIE. Well, I expect it'll be a good while before he manufactures anything but talk. Peddling knives sounds like a mighty trifling business to me.

MISS ZILLA. [*lifting herself in her chair and craning out of the window*] Is that Mr. Tom Conner going by?

MISS MINNIE. [*also craning*] Yes, it is. He hobbles like he was a hundred years old.

MRS. BOSTICK. [*rising, looking out of window, then back to audience*] And he's only two years older than I am. [*laughing*] I know I can't look that old. [*sits again*] I don't feel old at all.

MISS ZILLA. How is Mrs. Conner's rheumatism?

MRS. BOSTICK. It does look like she would get better or die.

MISS EMILY. Can't I get you some more tea, Ada?

MRS. BOSTICK. No, thank you, Miss Em'. But I will have another square of that gingerbread. [*Helps herself from plate beside her.*]

MISS ZILLA. Do you and Miss Minnie get over much to sit with Lizzie Conner?

MRS. BOSTICK. She ain't much company, I guess, but being neighbors —

MISS MINNIE. We try to do our duty by her.

MRS. BOSTICK. Lizzie is a good woman, even if she did always have a sharp tongue and no more tact than a bedbug.

MISS EMILY. It would more than likely sharpen anybody's tongue to suffer like she's suffered.

MISS MINNIE. Oh, she had a sharp tongue before she ever had rheumatism.

MRS. BOSTICK. When she was Lizzie Davis she couldn't taste a pickle for sourness. I used to wonder how she ever got Tom Conner.

MISS ZILLA. I think he's a nice man.

MRS. BOSTICK. I declare, I think I'll drop in and

see Lizzie a minute, as long as I'm right here so close.
[*Rises.*]

MISS ZILLA. I'll go with you, Mrs. Bostick. That is, if you don't object?

MRS. BOSTICK. The more the merrier.

MISS EMILY. She's always wishing folks would come to see her oftener.

MRS. BOSTICK. Well, if we're going, I expect we'd better be getting along over there pretty soon. [*rising*] You won't mind our running right after eating, will you, Miss Minnie, when it's running to take an ox out of the ditch, as you might say?

MISS MINNIE. I'm not so sure Lizzie would be thanking you for likening her to an ox, but I know what you mean.

MISS ZILLA. [*rising*] Well, we got a dozen of those dresses finished, and I think that's a lot. [*Every one begins to rise.*]

MISS EMILY. I'll get them over to the church when we are ready to send the box off.

MISS ZILLA. [*going*] You were going to give me that sunshine cake recipe, Miss Emily, don't forget. [*Goes out with MISS EMILY.*]

MISS EMILY. [*going*] Oh, it's very simple. You make it just the same as you do angel food, only you beat up two yolks and put 'em in before you add your flour. [*MISS ZILLA questions her, and MISS EMILY explains her recipe in full pantomime as they move out into the hall. MISS MINNIE goes over to the door and waits for MRS. BOSTICK and MRS. SAUNDERS to start. In the hall, MISS ZILLA is busy with her wraps. MRS. BOSTICK starts toward the door, but MRS. SAUNDERS, who is standing, makes no move to leave.*]

MRS. BOSTICK. [*turning back*] Why, Mrs. Saunders, aren't you coming, too?

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*hesitating as though other plans were on her mind*] Why, I — I —

MISS ZILLA. [*stepping forward into the room again*] Oh, do stop in, if only for a minute, Mrs. Saunders — unless your ankle's paining you?

MRS. SAUNDERS. It isn't my ankle. That's quite all right.

MRS. BOSTICK. [*taking her arm*] Come on, then. It will cheer Lizzie to see you. [*continues as she moves out*] I always did love visiting shut-ins myself. They're so glad to get the news.

[*MRS. SAUNDERS moves with her, but drops a little behind and at the door, as though calculating something, stops.*]

MRS. SAUNDERS. Go on, I'll be right with you. [*She comes quickly back into the room to where she was sitting, stealthily lays down her purse, looking back to make sure no one is watching what she is doing. Then she hurries out to the others.*]

MRS. BOSTICK. [*in the hall*] Tell Sue good-by. [*confused voices from the hall.*]

MRS. SAUNDERS. Good-by, Miss Minnie.

MISS ZILLA. Good-by.

MISS MINNIE. Good-by, Mrs. Saunders.

MISS ZILLA. Thank you for the recipe.

MISS EMILY. Come back when it isn't missionary work that brings you.

MISS MINNIE. [*to MRS. SAUNDERS*] Watch out for the bricks this time.

[*While they are saying farewell, SUE comes back into the room, keeping out of sight and listening to the voices. Her manner suggests that she is agitated and upset over something.*]

MISS MINNIE. [*coming back with MISS EMILY after they have sped the guests and closed the door*] Well,

Sue, you might have at least come back and said good-by. I don't know what they think.

SUE. [*wearily*] I'm sorry. [*as MISS EMILY starts to put the dishes back on the tray*] Let me do that, please, Aunt Em'. [*She begins to clear up while MISS EMILY puts on a cup or two, but is more interested in listening to MISS MINNIE.*]

MISS MINNIE. I suppose I ought to take a plate of this gingerbread over to Lizzie. She'll be asking them if we had anything to eat and feeling slighted if I don't.

MISS EMILY. I'll take it over.

MISS MINNIE. No, never mind, I'll go myself. I want to look at that walk. We might all of us be falling down and breaking our necks. I declare, Ada Bostick gets worse and worse. A tongue in her head rattles like a cowbell. Take those out first, Sue, you can't get everything on one tray; you'll be spilling 'em all if you try.

MISS EMILY. [*as SUE starts out with filled tray*] I'll open the door for you.

SUE. Thanks. [*She goes out.*]

MISS MINNIE. [*fuming*] The idea of Ada Bostick hinting there was something between Sue and that Oakes!

MISS EMILY. [*timidly*] But, sister, you said yesterday you didn't understand Sue lately, and suspected —

MISS MINNIE. What I suspected has got nothing to do with Ada Bostick. [*glancing out of the window*] There's some one coming back again. [*They both look out the window.*]

MISS EMILY. [*looking*] Why, it's Mrs. Saunders.

MISS MINNIE. I wonder what she wants?

MISS EMILY. I'll let her in. [*MISS EMILY goes into the hall and opens the door.*] Come in, Mrs. Saunders.

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*coming in*] Thank you, Miss

Emily. I'm sorry, but I left my purse. Don't bother; I think I know where it is. [*Comes over and gets it.*] Yes, here it is. I'm sorry I had to trouble you.

MISS MINNIE. I'm glad you discovered you'd left it before you had gone far.

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*standing a moment hesitating, and then speaking frankly*] Miss Minnie, I left my purse on purpose. I wanted to come back and tell you something I thought it was better for the others not to hear. It may not be anything, but, Miss Minnie, when I stumbled on that brick this afternoon, I pushed it out of place, and underneath it I found this.

MISS MINNIE. [*surprised*] Why, what is it?

MRS. SAUNDERS. It's a letter.

MISS MINNIE. [*astonished*] A letter! Under the brick! I don't understand —

MRS. SAUNDERS. Mrs. Bostick and Miss Zilla had caught up with me just about the time I had discovered what it was; and while they were here, I didn't have a chance to show it to you alone. I didn't understand, myself, and — well, sometimes I've found it better not to arouse people's curiosity.

MISS MINNIE. Well, who's it addressed to?

MRS. SAUNDERS. There isn't any name, and from what it says — perhaps you had better read it yourself.

MISS MINNIE. [*looking about*] Where'd I put my glasses, Emily?

MISS EMILY. I don't know, sister. [*starts to look about for them.*]

MISS MINNIE. [*puzzled*] Never mind — I don't understand. You read it, read it aloud, Mrs. Saunders.

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*reading*] "Sweetheart, I tried to meet you this morning on your way to school. I don't

see how I missed you, but I did. Important telegram has just come. I must leave tonight on the six o'clock train. You are coming with me. Yes, darling, I have it all planned. I have bought two tickets and am telephoning ahead for the license. This old post-office is the surest way to get a message to you. It has served us so many times, and I knew you would look under the brick. Who cares for old ladies guarding telephones? Be at the station early, dearest. I sha'n't breathe again until you are with me."

MISS MINNIE. [*changing from surprise into a steeled calm as she hears the letter*] Why — it couldn't be for any one in this house. Why, there's some mistake, that's all.

MISS EMILY. [*timidly*] Sister, maybe —

MISS MINNIE. [*pointedly, sweeping away all possibility for speculation*] There's nobody in this house that this letter could possibly concern. It belongs somewhere else.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Well, I didn't know, and —

MISS MINNIE. See if I didn't leave my glasses on that table, Emily. I'll have a look at it anyway, if you don't mind, though I know it's a mistake.

MISS EMILY. Here they are, sister.

[MISS MINNIE *puts them on and starts to look at the letter when SUE comes through the door. She hides the letter quickly behind her.*]

SUE. Oh, hello, Mrs. Saunders. I thought you'd gone — but I'm glad you haven't. I hope you didn't hurt your foot badly? Er — which brick was it? Aunt Minnie, don't you think I ought to find out, so I can fix it and no one —?

[MISS MINNIE *stares hard at her and SUE weakens under her gaze.*]

SUE. Well, if you don't want me to.

MISS MINNIE. You needn't bother! I'll look after the walk myself. You can finish taking these plates to the kitchen, though.

SUE. [*a bit piqued*] Certainly, I only wanted to help. [*She picks up the remaining dishes and goes out.*]

MISS MINNIE. [*to MISS EMILY*] Emily, keep her outside. Don't let her come back.

MISS EMILY. Yes, sister. [*She goes out.*]

[MISS MINNIE and MRS. SAUNDERS stand alone for a moment in silence, then MISS MINNIE sits on the sofa, drawing MRS. SAUNDERS down beside her.]

MISS MINNIE. Mrs. Saunders, you're a true Christian woman. I lied to you just now — because — because I'm a proud woman, and this — [*She taps the letter.*] — I needn't tell you, for you've already guessed the truth. But I don't know how to thank you for not telling the others this afternoon . . . The ways of God are strange, Mrs. Saunders — you spraining your ankle on that brick may have saved —

MRS. SAUNDERS. [*rising*] Don't try to explain it to me, Miss Minnie. I think I understand already all that's necessary for me to know, and I'm going to forget that when I go out of this house. I've lived long enough to learn how to forget sometimes, Miss Minnie. Don't come to the door with me; it isn't necessary. Good night. [*She hurries out quickly and draws the front door heavily closed behind her.*]

[MISS MINNIE does not change her position or speak until she is gone, but her eyes show her gratitude. When she is alone she rises, looking at the letter without really rereading it, and then looks about for a place to hide it. She first chooses a book on the table and places it between its leaves, but as she walks away she changes her mind and finally hides

it in a vase on the mantel. As she turns from hiding it, MISS EMILY enters and speaks a little hesitatingly as though she stood in awe of her sister.]

MISS EMILY. I heard the front door close. She's gone?

MISS MINNIE. Where's Sue?

MISS EMILY. She's washing up the cups. What are you going to do about it, Minnie? It confirms what you've been suspecting, doesn't it? Where's the letter?

MISS MINNIE. I hid it.

MISS EMILY. What for?

MISS MINNIE. She mustn't see it.

MISS EMILY. Where'd you hide it?

MISS MINNIE. Inside that green vase.

MISS EMILY. You're not going to say anything to her, then?

MISS MINNIE. Not now. It says he's leaving town tonight. Later, maybe. We must keep her from knowing anything until he's gone.

MISS EMILY. [*awed at the prospect*] Do you think she would have gone with him if —?

MISS MINNIE. I know she's not going with him. A Tremaine running away with an Oakes! Peddling knives at a fair for a living!

MISS EMILY. [*softly*] If she loves him —

MISS MINNIE. Loves? Love has nothing to do with it. How can she love one of those Oakes!

MISS EMILY. But you remember when she was in high school, what happened when you —

MISS MINNIE. When I took a firm hand? I'll take a firm hand again, and she'll live to thank me for saving her. Just as you have, Em' Tremaine, for saving *you*. What if I'd have let you go off and make a fool of yourself with Frank Ellis? There's worse things than being an old maid.

MISS EMILY. Oh, I'm sure of it. I've never said I wasn't grateful to you, sister.

MISS MINNIE. If Sue wants to marry, she can marry some one that's in her own —

MISS EMILY. Yes, sister. I hope she finds a nice man that will be good to her. [*as an afterthought*] But how's she going to meet him in this town?

MISS MINNIE. You and I have gotten on very well without meeting any man. It's common for all the women in a family to break their necks getting married. In almost every good family you'll find women who haven't married. You don't wish you'd married Frank Ellis, just to be married?

MISS EMILY. Oh, I know you are right. You were right about me. [*pause, and then softly*] I didn't have the courage. [*pause*] Is the letter safe in that vase?

MISS MINNIE. For the present. I'll put it somewhere else later.

MISS EMILY. Well, what must we do now? How must we act, I mean?

MISS MINNIE. Why, act just as though we didn't suspect anything — as though nothing had happened. She mustn't suspect we know anything tonight. I'll go take that plate of gingerbread over to Lizzie Conner. [*She goes out. MISS EMILY turns on the light on the table, then walks over to the vase. Looks at it and timidly starts to take out the letter. Hearing some one, she stuffs it quickly back into the vase. MISS MINNIE comes through with a plate covered with a napkin.*] I told Sue to bring in the dustpan. I noticed Ada Bostick spilled gingerbread crumbs on the floor — over by that chair. Show her. I won't be gone long. [*She goes out the front door.*]

SUE. [*entering with dust pan*] Aunt Minnie doesn't need her glasses to see dirt,

MISS EMILY. [*pointing*] Over by that armchair, Sue. [SUE brushes them up. There is a pause during which MISS EMILY seems restless. Finally she speaks.] Sue, is Carter Oakes in town?

SUE. [*looking up quickly, on her guard*] Why, how should I know, Aunt Emily? [*bitterly*] Aunt Minnie can probably tell you more about it than I can.

MISS EMILY. He's been back in town this summer?

SUE. Well, if he has, I'm not to —

MISS EMILY. You've seen him, haven't you?

SUE. [*pleadingly*] Aunt Em' —

MISS EMILY. Tell me. It may be better —

SUE. Does Aunt Minnie — has she found out?

MISS EMILY. [*looking out the window*] Your Aunt Minnie will be back in a minute. Don't waste any time. Sue, do you love him?

SUE. [*a little defiantly, because she is not sure what MISS EMILY is driving at*] Yes, I love him. I've loved him ever since I was in high school. Oh, Aunt Em', Aunt Minnie could make me stop seeing him, but she couldn't stop me thinking of him. She didn't stop what was inside of me. Yes, he's been back, and I have been seeing him.

MISS EMILY. He still loves you?

SUE. Yes, he does. I know he does, and some day, Aunt Em', in spite of Aunt Minnie — [*breaking out*] she hasn't the right — nobody has the right to make anybody else's life. Do you think so? [*slight pause*] Have they?

MISS EMILY. I'm not sure, Sue. Your Aunt Minnie knows what's right and wrong so clearly — and I never could quite tell. [*a bit wistful*] It's hard on me sometimes. [*quickly*] She's a fine woman, Sue.

SUE. You know something. It's about Carter. What is it, Aunt Em'?

MISS EMILY. [*a little frightened*] You mustn't get that idea, child.

SUE. Well, if Aunt Minnie goes trying to interfere with — I'm older now. She can't stop me as she did once. She can't bully me —

MISS EMILY. Bully you! Your Aunt Minnie! Sue, you forget about whom you are speaking. My sister —

SUE. You're loyal to her, I know, in spite of the fact that she's always — [*breaking out suddenly*] Why did you mention Carter just now?

MISS EMILY. I don't know — I wish I hadn't — If you — [*with finality*] I'll not mention him again.

SUE. [*losing her rebellious tone*] Aunt Em'?

MISS EMILY. [*a guilty conscience making her slightly severe*] You'd better finish those crumbs now. [*looking out the window*] Some one's coming along the street. It looks like your Aunt Minnie. [*She continues to look out into the dusk as though she desired no further conversation.*]

SUE. [*after surveying the dustpan and then turning to the back of MISS EMILY*] Oh, if you only knew him, Aunt Em'. He's so fine!

MISS EMILY. [*after a slight hesitation, turning round*] Who?

SUE. You know who I mean — Carter.

MISS EMILY. [*gently*] I thought we'd agreed not to —?

SUE. You did, but — oh, you don't know how splendid he is! You don't know what he's been through. Some day he's going to do great things.

MISS EMILY. [*a little wearily*] It isn't likely the great things he's going to do will concern me — or you either.

SUE. Aunt Em', I'm not so sure. If I could only help him. If I thought it would help him to — [*She*

leaves the sentence unfinished, her romance written on her face.]

MISS EMILY. [*gently*] You'd what?

SUE. I'd do anything a woman can do. He's got so much, if only there's some one — the right one, to —

MISS EMILY. They say a woman can't do much to influence a man — not really. If he's going to drink himself to death, he'll go on — even if she marries him. And if he's going to do great things, I suppose he can do them without her, too.

SUE. [*amazed*] You never talked to me like this.

MISS EMILY. [*after a silent moment*] Have you courage, Sue? Have you courage to love him so that nothing matters?

SUE. [*thoughtfully*] I think so . . . What is it, Aunt Em'?

MISS EMILY. [*softly*] I didn't have the courage once, that's all — [*quickly*] If your Aunt Minnie knew what I've been saying to you —

SUE. Something's happened. Has Carter —? [*pleadingly*] What is it? Please tell me. [*slight pause*] Oh, tell me, Aunt Em'.

MISS EMILY. [*Hesitates, then speaks with a voice that has a new note of determination in it.*] Carter's going away — tonight!

SUE. [*struck with horror*] It isn't true . . . [*falteringly*] How do you know?

MISS EMILY. [*mustering all the firmness in her nature into her voice to go through with things, pointing*] That vase.

SUE. [*bewildered, going toward it*] Vase?

MISS EMILY. Yes. See what you find. [*SUE goes slowly over, takes it down, and takes out the paper.*]

SUE. [*holding it up questioningly*] This?

MISS: Yes, read it quickly. [*SUE unfolds it and starts in recognition.*]

SUE. Oh, Aunt Em'!

MISS EMILY. [*as SUE reads it*] Mrs. Saunders found it under the brick this afternoon.

SUE. [*rapturously*] Oh, it's all right! It's all right after all. I couldn't understand why I didn't hear! I walked up and down the streets an hour, hoping I'd meet him. I couldn't understand. [*emphatically*] I looked under that brick.

MISS EMILY. What are you going to do? He means tonight . . . doesn't he?

SUE. Yes.

MISS EMILY. Are you going with him?

SUE. [*as though that settled it*] He says he wants me to come.

MISS EMILY. Have you got the courage — to go like this — with your Aunt Minnie —?

SUE. Courage? He wants me to come. It doesn't take courage to do what he wants me to do. Aunt Em', you don't understand when you love somebody —

MISS EMILY. [*softly*] Don't I, Sue? [*with apprehension*] You'd better put back the letter in the vase. Aunt Minnie put it there. She'll be coming back.

SUE. [*startled*] Does she know?

MISS EMILY. Not that I've told you. She mustn't suspect that. She'd never forgive me.

SUE. [*rushing to her and throwing her arms about her*] Oh, I always, always did love you best!

MISS EMILY. Don't say that. You mustn't, Sue. It's because Minnie loves you — she wants — Minnie's a good woman and I — maybe I'm a bad one. Are you going, Sue?

SUE. Of course I'm going, Aunt Em'.

MISS EMILY. Well, you haven't much time.

SUE. I'd better get things.

MISS EMILY. What about your school? You can't just go off like this —

SUE. Oh, that'll be fixed up. Gladys Knowles has been substituting for two years. I think she's been praying every night that something would happen to give her a regular place. [MISS EMILY goes to the window.] They need the money.

MISS EMILY. [suddenly] There's your Aunt Minnie coming back. [pleadingly] Whatever happens, don't tell her I —

SUE. Oh, I know it, darling Aunt Em'. If she asks for me, say I've gone upstairs to rinse out my blue blouse. [She goes out.]

[MISS EMILY stands in the center of the floor a moment while MISS MINNIE enters.]

MISS MINNIE. Well, Lizzie Conner is a hard one to please. She's complaining of too much company today. She didn't object to the gingerbread, though. Whatever's the matter with Lizzie, her appetite is not afflicted. Where's Sue?

MISS EMILY. [innocently] She said she was going upstairs to rinse out her blue blouse.

MISS MINNIE. [spying dustpan] Pshaw, she's gone off and left the dustpan lying right in the middle of the floor! Lot of good she did brushing up crumbs like that. She didn't get them all, either. [She kneels down and begins to finish the job.] She wouldn't know how to keep a home if she had one. I shan't ever give Ada Bostick gingerbread in my house again if she's going to eat it like this. We can't leave those missionary dresses there.

MISS EMILY. I'll wrap them up and have them ready in the hall closet.

MISS MINNIE. Emily, that letter worries me. You're sure Sue's upstairs?

MISS EMILY. She just went up, sister.

MISS MINNIE. [looking at the clock] That train goes in forty minutes. She can't suspect. And, anyway,

how do we *know* that letter is for her? Hand me my glasses. If he leaves town tonight — [*She takes down the letter and looks at it a minute.*] Emily, light that candle.

MISS EMILY. Candle?

MISS MINNIE. Yes, light it. It's better not to tempt Providence. I'll feel safer when I know — [*MISS EMILY lights the candle and brings it to her. She sets the letter on fire and burns it in the tin holder. As it burns, thoughtfully.*] Providence takes strange ways, Emily. If Mrs. Saunders hadn't sprained her ankle, Sue might this minute —

MISS EMILY. [*meekly*] Yes, sister.

MISS MINNIE. I'll wash these ashes down the sink. [*She blows out the candle and goes out, leaving MISS EMILY deep in her own thoughts.*]

[*SUE opens the door at the side cautiously and comes around abruptly.*]

MISS EMILY. Oh, Sue! How'd you get ready so soon?

SUE. I thought it might happen. I had my bag all packed under my bed. [*A long low whistle like some sort of signal is heard from the street. SUE starts violently.*] That's Carter. [*picking up her bag*] He's come to get me.

MISS MINNIE. [*calling offstage*] Emily . . . I forgot that dustpan.

[*MISS EMILY and SUE look at one another frozen with horror for a moment. SUE starts to open the door to retreat, but fearing she will be caught abruptly, swings it open and using it as a screen, hides behind it so that she is not seen by MISS MINNIE, who enters a few moments later from door in back.*]

MISS EMILY. [*softly, almost in hysterics, as SUE hides*] Oh, she's coming. Hide! Hide!

MISS MINNIE. [*offstage*] Oh, Emily, bring it here.

[MISS EMILY *picks up the dustpan and tries to collect herself, looking back over her shoulder in an agonized way to make sure SUE can't be seen.*]

MISS MINNIE. [*entering*] Why didn't you answer me? Who were you talking to?

MISS EMILY. I —

MISS MINNIE. I thought I heard voices.

MISS EMILY. Maybe you did — on the street.

[*The whistle is heard again, this time louder.*]

MISS MINNIE. What's that noise? [*She peers out the window.*]

MISS EMILY. Maybe it's one of the people you heard — on the street?

MISS MINNIE. Sounds like a signal. [*suddenly suspicious*] It might be —

MISS EMILY. [*ready to collapse*] Oh, sister!

MISS MINNIE. Well, don't go to pieces. It probably isn't.

MISS EMILY. [*getting back her courage*] No, it isn't likely. Didn't the letter say he'd meet her at the station?

MISS MINNIE. Yes, but it *would* be like an Oakes to stand outside somewhere whistling like a darkey, instead of coming to the front door.

MISS EMILY. He — tried the front door until you drove him —

MISS MINNIE. Sue can do without company, if it's that sort. It looks like she'd have more sense than to fall in love with —

MISS EMILY. You don't fall in love with your head.

MISS MINNIE. [*irritated*] Well, you didn't, anyway.

MISS EMILY. [*Flinches as though cut, and for the rest of the scene is firmer and more determined — shortly.*] No!

MISS MINNIE. I think we'd better call Sue down, in case —

MISS EMILY. [*firmly*] I think we'd better not.

MISS MINNIE. [*surprised at the tone*] What?

MISS EMILY. [*wavering slightly*] She's upstairs rinsing out that blouse. If you go calling her without any reason —

MISS MINNIE. Well — maybe —

MISS EMILY. You empty this dustpan. I'll finish with these dresses. Then we can talk about what's best — [MISS MINNIE *takes pan and exits*. MISS EMILY *rushes to SUE, urging her across the room.*] Come, while she's gone. She'll be back in a moment. [*The two of them stop just inside the room by the door to the front hall.*] Do you know where you're going, Sue?

SUE. I'll write you . . . everything.

MISS EMILY. Maybe it's best. I don't know. I'm not used to . . . to thwarting Minnie. Wait! [*She draws something out of the neck of her dress and hands it to SUE.*] Take this. You might need it.

SUE. Money? Keep it, darling Aunt Em', I won't.

MISS EMILY. [*pressing it on her*] Please. [*She takes it. In sudden terror.*] Oh, go! Go! If Minnie should — I can't stand it any longer. [*SUE goes out swiftly through the front hall. MISS EMILY watches her disappear in highest suspense, looking through the window.*]

MISS MINNIE. [*coming back*] Do you believe in the hand of the Lord, Em'?

MISS EMILY. [*turning and getting control of herself*] Why . . . I'm not sure just what you mean, sister?

MISS MINNIE. I mean after this afternoon? Mrs. Saunders spraining her ankle — The Lord takes strange ways, but he is mindful of his own.

MISS EMILY. [*fervently*] I hope so.

[*The whistle is again heard. This time as though farther away.*]

MISS MINNIE. Why, there's that whistle —

MISS EMILY. Yes, it's down the street. [*An answering whistle comes.*] Somebody answered it.

MISS MINNIE. [*reassured*] Why, yes, that proves — We ought to be more trusting.

MISS EMILY. Yes, sister. I'll just get these missionary dresses put up.

CURTAIN . . .

THE RESIGNATION OF BILL SNYDER ¹

By John D. Shaver

CHARACTERS

BILL SNYDER,	}	<i>carriers on the four R. F. D. routes</i>
EDWARD McDONALD,		
GRANT WILLIAMS,		
RALPH RILEY,		
SHERMAN FISCHER,		<i>the postmaster</i>
GEORGE GUYER,	}	<i>applicants for job of temporary carrier on R. R. 3</i>
HANK PHILLIPS,		
JESS MILLS,		
GUSTAVE ANDERSON,		
BEN PERRY,		<i>a new storekeeper in the town</i>
DOCTOR GOODSON,		<i>the station agent</i>
		<i>the doctor</i>

The scene is the lobby of a small-town post-office on the second day of January. It is about seven o'clock in the morning. A blizzard is raging outside. In the center of the room is a big box stove set in a shallow box of cinders. By the stove is a goods box and a stool. Against the rear wall is a bench, and in the upper right-hand corner is a large waste basket. Out to the left is the mail room. In the partition between the lobby and the mail room are the general delivery windows and slots for mailing letters and packages. The door leading into the mail room is in the upper left-hand corner. Center right

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is the door to the street. Around this door and around the stove snow has been tracked in from outside. Every one who comes in is well wrapped up in overcoat and muffler.

SHERM FISCHER, the postmaster, is poking the fire and sweeping up the snow around the stove. He is about fifty years old, thin and slightly stooped. He is wearing a very ordinary business suit, rather old and unpressed.

GUSTAVE ANDERSON, the new storekeeper, enters. He is a round, bustling person, in his forties, a progressive business man and a good citizen. He is carrying some small packages.

FISCHER. Well, how-do-you-do, Mr. Anderson? What are you going to think of our town, having such weather as this?

ANDERSON. By Jims, I thought I was coming to a warm country. Why, we never had it any worse than this in Minnesota. [*He notices the snow he has trailed in.*] I didn't get much off my feet outside, did I? If everybody that comes in tracks in that much, it'll keep you sweepin' all day.

FISCHER. Oh, I won't mind. I won't have anything else to do. There won't be many in.

ANDERSON. [*stamping his feet, and going to the stove*] Ain't it terrible?

FISCHER. It sure is. Worst I've seen in years. I had ten below this morning, but it feels worse'n that when the wind hits you.

ANDERSON. I had twelve. That sleet cuts like glass. I nearly froze coming across the street. Are the carriers going this morning?

FISCHER. Sure! They'll start. Some of them may not get around, but they'll try it, and go as far as they can. We've got a fine lot of boys, Mr. Anderson.

I'm going on my second term as postmaster and I don't recollect any of 'em not starting. We're mighty proud of our record here in the office.

ANDERSON. That's fine.

FISCHER. The boys sure can do some braggin' at the association meetings. We got one of the best records of any office in the state.

ANDERSON. Who have you got to take Route 3?

FISCHER. Well, we haven't got anybody yet.

ANDERSON. Well, here's a little more for each of the boys. [*Shows the packages.*] Got to let people know we're ready for business.

FISCHER. What are they?

ANDERSON. They're some ads. I got 'em up as New Year's greetings for everybody on all the routes. I've got some of my prices on 'em and a suggestion to compare with mail-order house prices. Here, take one. [*He takes a small, neat folder from his pocket and gives it to FISCHER.*] I'm going to try to clear out that stock and make a real store out of it. These would have gone out before this, but I didn't want to send them till I was in charge and done invoicing. We'll finish this morning.

FISCHER. [*who is looking over the circular*] Pretty nice, all right. Did the *Ledger* do 'em?

ANDERSON. Oh, you bet. I believe in patronizing our own folks, wherever I am. Besides, they do good work. I'm going to have them do a lot for me.

FISCHER. This is a bad day for the boys to take 'em.

ANDERSON. That's just the point. Soon as we saw last night what the weather was liable to be this morning, we wrote on all of the ads, "We serve in spite of the weather; can the mail-order house do more?" That's the reason they've just got to go out this morning. I want to get 'em on Route 3 especially on account

of having Bill in the store. That's something that counts.

[Enter RALPH RILEY, the youngest of the carriers, a husky, boyish young fellow in his late twenties.]

RALPH. [going to the stove, unwrapping and blowing on his fingers] By Jacks, let me to a stove. What'll we do today, Sherm? Freeze?

FISCHER. You'll sure have to keep moving and stop in and warm about every box.

RALPH. Ain't the other boys going?

FISCHER. Sure. Mack's in putting up his mail now.

RALPH. Well, what's the matter with Bill Snyder? When I came by his place he was standing at the window and he waved and came to the door and hollered and asked if I was going. I said yes, and rode on. If he don't go, it'll be the first time Route 3's missed a day in his fifteen years, won't it?

FISCHER. Why, Bill's resigned. Didn't you know it?

RALPH. Resigned! Go 'long! Has something really happened that he can't go?

FISCHER. No. I'm not joking; he's quit, actually. Handed in his resignation when he came in off the route day before yesterday, last day of December. I supposed you'd heard it.

RALPH. No. You know I was first one in that day. We was over visiting at my wife's folks yesterday, and I didn't come in. Grant put up my mail. What's the matter? What'd Bill resign for?

FISCHER. Well, you know he's over the age limit and finished his fifteen years of service last October, so he could retire any time and get his pension.

RALPH. Well, what put it into his head to quit now?

FISCHER. Oh, we've had all this bad weather and mud, and he's had a lot of breakdowns and other bad

luck and when he came in off the route Tuesday he said he'd been thinking, and he just believed he'd quit right then at the last of the year. Said his wife and their daughter had been begging him to; and we'd have New Year's Day off to get somebody, so that Route 3 wouldn't miss a day and the new man could start right in with the new year. So he just set down and wrote out his resignation to take effect immediately.

RALPH. Have you sent it in yet?

FISCHER. No, not yet. I've got it in my pocket.

RALPH. Read it. I'll never believe it till I hear it.

FISCHER. Here it is. [*reads*] "Fourth Ass't. Postmaster General, Wash., D. C. Dear Sir: Having served over fifteen consecutive years in the United States Civil Service as a rural mail carrier, and having passed the retirement age of sixty-five years, I beg leave to present, through my postmaster, my resignation from the service to take effect immediately. Yours respectfully, William Snyder, carrier Route 3."

RALPH. Well, that's just like Bill. When anything's to do, do it! Who's going to take his place? This is the kind of days we need Bill.

FISCHER. I don't know yet. I told Bill I'd appoint anybody he recommended as temporary carrier. You know he's never had to have a substitute. [*Telephone rings in mail room.*] I wonder who that is now. [*to ANDERSON*] I'll take these ads in. [*He goes into the mail room.*]

RALPH. Well, that beats me! I can't imagine this post-office without Bill Snyder on Route 3. Why, he's the only carrier ever been on the route, and he's never missed a day. That route is the pride of the state. Them people out there's got more confidence in Bill's getting there than they have in the sun coming up. And he always got there too. I've seen him go it worse days

than this. It's the way Bill does that keeps the rest of us going so.

ANDERSON. Yes, I've heard about Bill. That's why I grabbed him for the store.

RALPH. For the store?

ANDERSON. Yes, Bill was over there Tuesday right after he resigned. As soon as I heard it, I knew he was the man I wanted, and I made him a proposition, and he took me up. He's to start in as soon as we finish invoicing. We'll get done this morning, I believe.

RALPH. Might know Bill wouldn't set down on a pension and do nothing. [*Enter FISCHER from the mail room.*]

FISCHER. That was Bill, then, wanting to know who was taking Route 3. Might know he'd be stewing about it. Said a lot of the boys were down to see him yesterday, and he just told 'em all that the first one down here this morning he'd recommend. But he didn't know this was coming. There ain't everybody like Bill, ready to start out on a day like this.

RALPH. Well, they'd better be showing up, and I'd better be getting to work. [*as he enters the mail room*] Hello, Mack! Did much come up on 19?

MACK. [*in mail room*] Not much.

ANDERSON. Who all is wanting Bill's place?

FISCHER. Oh, three or four; Hank Phillips, Tom Beeks, Jess Mills, Larry Mathers, George Guyer. I think they every one went down to see Bill yesterday.

ANDERSON. I thought they got these carriers' jobs by examination.

FISCHER. They do, but you never can tell when they'll be held; maybe three weeks; maybe three months.

ANDERSON. That temporary carrier job might be a pretty good thing then.

FISCHER. Yes, and the fellow that is on as temporary

carrier learns a lot that helps him in the examination. He generally gets the regular job anyway. That's why these fellows want it.

[*Enter GRANT WILLIAMS, wrapped up, but cold; comes to stove as he takes off gloves and muffler; a stocky, heavy-set man about forty years old.*]

GRANT. Br-r-r-r! Ain't this a day?

FISCHER. It's sure bad. That snow'll drift twenty feet deep by night if it keeps up.

GRANT. Lord help the fellow that's taking Bill's place on Route 3. He has to start right out facing it. Who's taking it?

FISCHER. I don't know; one of the boys that's applying, I guess. Bill just now 'phoned and said give it to the first one that come down. Said that would be a test for 'em.

GRANT. Well, I know one that's out. Larry Mathers was down to the barn and said he was glad he hadn't signed up for it. Said he wouldn't go this morning for a million dollars.

FISCHER. Well, some of 'em better be showing up. Their mail's all up and waiting. Your mail up?

GRANT. All but what came up on 19; that won't be much.

FISCHER. You needn't take any fourth class stuff this morning.

GRANT. I'll take that package for little Alice Thompson. It's a Christmas present from her brother in the Marines. Clear from the Philippines; that's why it's late.

ANDERSON. It'll be a job taking it horseback.

GRANT. I'll manage some way to get it there and stop in and warm and she'll show me what it is. I hope it's nothing that will freeze.

ANDERSON. I want that Route 3 mail to go if pos-

sible. I've got to get back to the store now. If any of the boys that want the route are there, I'll send 'em over. If Bill comes in, tell him to come over. I expect we could use him this morning, but I hate to call him out in this blizzard.

FISCHER. All right, I'll tell him; — and send some of them boys over. [ANDERSON *exits.*] That Anderson is a live wire; I'm glad he's come here; he'll make a real store out of Davison's old place.

GRANT. Yes, and specially now that he's got Bill. But I can't imagine Bill selling dress goods and wrapping up sugar.

FISCHER. Bill will make a good clerk, though; knows everybody in the county.

GRANT. Bet he'll be a pardner in a year.

FISCHER. Well, them two would make a good pair.

[*Enter BEN PERRY, the railroad station agent, about thirty years old, a likable fellow, but of few words.*]

FISCHER. Good morning, Ben. When'd you ship in this weather? That snow and sleet'd cut a man's face off.

PERRY. And it nearly has mine! [*Like the others, he goes to the stove to warm.*] Are the carriers going?

GRANT. Yes, don't you envy us?

PERRY. No, but I'm glad you're going. Load of cattle came in last night for Charley Ward, and they'll die if he don't get 'em to shelter, and his wire's down and I'll have to write him. [*Gives FISCHER an envelope.*]

GRANT. He's on Route 3, ain't he?

PERRY. Yes.

FISCHER. Well, Ben, I don't know whether Route 3 will go or not. Nobody was signed up for it, and I don't know whether we can get anybody to go on a day like this, or not.

PERRY. Didn't anybody apply for Bill's job? Two

or three told me yesterday they was going down to see Bill to try to get his recommendation.

FISCHER. Yes, but this won't look good to them. One's backed out already.

PERRY. Well, I've got to get that notice out there some way. [*Enter GEORGE GUYER, a young fellow in his twenties.*]

FISCHER. Come in, George. Did Anderson send you over?

GEORGE. Yes, what's this about having to take Route 3 this morning if you want the temporary job? Anderson said he had a lot of stuff that had to go out and he was going to get somebody to take it.

PERRY. Yes, and I've got something that's got to go out. The company may be held for a lawsuit if a lot of them cattle die, and it might all come down on my head. Besides, I've got some feeling for the cattle.

GEORGE. Well, what's that got to do with carrying the mail twenty-five miles through this blizzard?

FISCHER. Uncle Sam's mail has to go, George, blizzard or no blizzard. And this is Route 3, that ain't missed a day since Bill Snyder carried the first round, over fifteen years ago. You've been wanting in the service; now's your chance. You know what it means to get the temporary carrier job.

GEORGE. Why, what's the use of starting out in this? You wouldn't get half-way around. None of you will.

GRANT. We'll try it anyway. I've been on five years and never was afraid to start.

GEORGE. [*Flushes and gets a little angry at the insinuation of cowardice.*] Well, I'm not afraid either, and I want the job, but I don't see the sense in starting something you can't finish.

GRANT. We don't know we can't till we try. The mail has to go, George. You can't tell what you're carrying or how much it might mean to somebody.

GEORGE. Well, I'll go down and see how my horse is, and if things don't look too bad, maybe I'll go.

GRANT. [*going to mail room*] That's the stuff, George. Only cut that "maybe" out of it.

GEORGE. [*as he goes out*] Well, I'll see how it feels.

FISCHER. I don't believe he'll go.

PERRY. I don't either. [*RALPH comes to door of mail room.*]

RALPH. What's George going to do?

FISCHER. Said he'd go look at his horse and come back and tell us.

RALPH. He'd make a good carrier if he ever got the spirit. I don't think I'd 'a' gone my first day in such a storm as this, either.

FISCHER. Oh, yes, you would, Ralph. You used to sub for Haley on just as bad days as this.

RALPH. I was afraid not to; the other boys would have laid me out.

FISCHER. Ha! Ha! Well, they'd 'a' felt like it. Remember the day you upset in Black Creek and like to 'a' drown'd getting the mail out?

RALPH. Do I? Say, if I ever was sick of a job I was that day. I don't see how Doc ever kept me from getting pneumonia.

PERRY. Was that the time that all you had with you was one letter?

RALPH. No, that was Mack. He went all the way round one raw November day with one letter; great big fat one from New York City for Amanda Jacobs. She met him at the box and opened the letter, and it was a washing machine ad. Lord! Mack was mad.

[*Enter HANK PHILLIPS, a lean, rat-faced fellow about forty years old, inclined to shiftlessness, not so well dressed as the others, chewing tobacco and ex-pectorating with much energy.*]

HANK. By gosh, it's gittin' colder every minute.

FISCHER. Good morning, Mr. Phillips, you coming in to see about carrying the mail on Route 3?

HANK. See what?

RALPH. You coming in to take Bill's route?

HANK. Yes, like thunder! A man would freeze to death before he got out of the first drift.

FISCHER. Well, I was going to say you was probably too late. George Guyer's been here and spoke about it. He's down to the barn now looking over his outfit to see if he wants to tackle it.

HANK. Why, anybody's a fool to start out such a day as this. I'll bet George won't take it. I'll wait for the examination. That decides the thing, anyhow.

PERRY. Look here, Hank! Bill Snyder's went worse days than this. Anybody that's after Bill Snyder's job will have to do Bill Snyder's work.

HANK. To hell with Bill Snyder's work. I don't look like a fool, do I? What do you care about it?

FISCHER. Ben's got a car load of cattle in for Charley Ward, and he's got to get him word, and the wire's down.

HANK. They can go to the devil for all of me.

[*Enter DOCTOR GOODSON, a tall, grave, elderly man.*]

FISCHER. Good morning, Doc! Is it cold enough for you?

DOC GOODSON. Yes, and there's wind enough and sleet enough. Have the carriers gone?

FISCHER. No, but they'll be going in a few minutes.

DOC GOODSON. Good! I've got some medicine to go out. This is for John Taylor on Route 1; and put this in for Herbert Pierson out on Route 3. [*He hands FISCHER a small package.*] It's medicine for his wife. She's awfully bad, but she has a fighting chance. I was

out yesterday and left her all of those drops I had made up, but it wasn't enough. I called out this morning and Herbert said they thought she was a little better, but they were about out of medicine. I could hardly hear him, and just as I started to tell him I couldn't come, but would send some by the carrier, something snapped and I couldn't hear him at all. Central said she thought the wire went down.

PERRY. Yes, I tried to call to Ward's a bit ago and I couldn't get anything.

DOC GOODSON. What's the matter at Ward's?

PERRY. He's got a car load of cattle in. They'll some of them die if he doesn't get 'em to shelter.

DOC GOODSON. Who'd you get to take Route 3 now, Sherm?

FISCHER. We ain't got nobody, Doc. That's just the trouble. They won't take it in this storm. The other boys are going, but it looks like Route 3 won't, unless George Guyer takes it.

[GEORGE GUYER *enters in time to hear the last sentence.*

DOC GOODSON. Here's George now. He's just the boy for a carrier's job. Give it to him.

GEORGE. Not on your life you don't. It's getting worse every minute. My horses ain't fit to face this anyway; they couldn't make the drifts. I'd go if it wasn't for that.

DOC GOODSON. You can have my horse, George.

GEORGE. [*caught, rather doggedly*]. I — I — I don't want to take anybody else's horse out into this and kill him.

FISCHER. One of 'em'll just have to go now. [*to the boys*] You all know Martha Pierson. She's mighty sick. [*'Phone rings inside.*] Answer that, Mack. Me and the carrier boys wants the mail to go, because

that's our job and because Route 3 ain't never missed a day since it was started. You may not care anything about that, but you can't turn down Doc Goodson when he's trying to get medicine to Martha Pierson.

GEORGE. Is she worse?

DOC GOODSON. No, she's some better and may have a chance to pull through if I can get some more medicine out to her.

GEORGE. Why can't you go, Doc?

DOC GOODSON. I've got to take care of the Bradley twins. Diptheria. I'm going down there right now.

[FISCHER and the DOCTOR talk aside.]

GEORGE. [*speaking rather low to HANK*] Was you figuring on taking it, Hank?

HANK. Not in this blizzard, I won't. Go on and take it if you want to.

GEORGE. Man, a fellow'd freeze to death! Let Doc take his own medicine; that's his business.

HANK. He'll have another patient if he can get somebody to go out in this storm.

[*Enter EDWARD McDONALD with mail pouches.*

He is a small, wiry man about forty-five years old.]

MACK. That was Bill again wanting to know if you'd got somebody for his route yet. Said he'd called down to Tom Beeks and he wouldn't take it. I told him some of the boys were here now and I thought would go.

GEORGE. Well, you've got another think coming if you were thinking of me.

MACK. Well, Bill says his mail has to go whether anybody else's went or not. Said his record shouldn't be broke.

DOC GOODSON. It's got to go for Herbert Pierson's wife, and you fellows ought to be ashamed not to take it.

MACK. That's what I say.

HANK. George's the first one applied.

GEORGE. What's Bill interested for? He's quit.

DOC GOODSON. A man like Bill Snyder never quits.

FISCHER. Well, here's somebody's chance for a hundred-and-fifty-dollars-a-month job, and the mail's got to go this morning.

GEORGE. Some fellows may want the job bad enough to face this blizzard for it, but I don't.

HANK. Days like this don't come once in ten years. A fellow might carry that route half a lifetime and never hit a storm like this again. Bill said I stood as good a chance as the next fellow in the examination. I'll take it when it comes, and try to get on that way, but I'm going right back to my fire on a day like this. Give me my mail, Sherm; that's what I came for.

[FISCHER goes behind general delivery window and hands out mail.]

GEORGE. Same here. [gets his mail] Let everybody look out for their own business.

HANK. If you want to send that medicine, Doc, go hire somebody to take it. It'll be lots quicker than mailing it.

DOC GOODSON. That's what I'll do, but with a storm like this on I'd rather trust Uncle Sam's carrier to get there than anybody I can hire. That was Bill Snyder's way. If he knew Martha Pierson was depending on him for medicine that might be all that could save her life, he'd get there and laugh at a blizzard.

MACK. Have you tried Jess Mills yet? He said yesterday he was going to take the examination.

FISCHER. [who has returned from handing out the mail] No, I ain't tried him.

GEORGE. He'll be over at the garage.

DOC GOODSON. Well, I don't know what to do. I can't wait much longer. Those drops have got to start out there pretty soon. I wish Bill Snyder knew how bad that mail ought to go.

PERRY. He wouldn't give a damn. He'd go the round just as quick with nothing but a last weeks' newspaper.

[Enter GRANT from mail room with pouches and a parcel post package.]

RALPH. Ready, Grant?

GRANT. Yes. Your mail up?

RALPH. All but about three miles. I'd better get to it; I'll be the last one out. [Exit.]

GRANT.. Ready, Mack?

MACK. Yes, we'll stop at the garage and have them send Jess over.

FISCHER. Do. As quick as you can.

HANK. [to GEORGE, at one side where they are looking at newspapers] What's he got to do with it?

GEORGE. Oh, he's got some ads he wants somebody to freeze to death to carry around.

HANK. Some people ain't got no sense at all.

[Telephone rings inside.]

FISCHER. I'll bet that's Bill again.

RALPH. [in mail room] Sherm, here's Bill wants to talk to you again.

FISCHER. Coming. [Exit.]

ANDERSON. I wish Bill would come down. We could use him in putting on some tags.

[PERRY goes to the general delivery window.]

PERRY. [speaking through the window] Is all the mail up?

RALPH. [in the mail room] Yes, all for the boxes.

[PERRY goes to a box and takes out some mail which he starts to look at. ANDERSON does the same.]

[Enter JESS MILLS. Under his overcoat he has on a pair of greasy mechanic's union-alls. He has the grimy appearance of a garage hand just called from his work.]

JESS. By Whilikers; what d'y know about such a day? It's gettin' worse all the time. Where's Sherm? The boss said he wanted to see me.

PERRY. He does, Jess. Didn't you want Bill Snyder's job as carrier on Route 3?

JESS. I sure do. I went down yesterday and seen him about it, and he said I stood as good a chance as anybody.

ANDERSON. Well, you stand a better. The other applicants have all laid down on the job this morning, and you're the last one. You're the man we're looking for. I knew we'd find somebody to go.

JESS. Go! The carriers ain't going this morning, are they?

DOC GOODSON. Sure they are, Jess. Uncle Sam's mail has to go.

JESS. Well, they don't get this chicken out on a day like this! Not much!

GEORGE. Another guy with brains.

DOC GOODSON. Jess, I've got to get some medicine out this morning to Martha Pierson.

JESS. Well, take it yourself, or have somebody.

HANK. That's what I told him, Jess.

FISCHER. [*entering from the mail room*] Jess, Bill just 'phoned again. It's the third time. Said his mail never had missed a day and it had to go this morning.

DOC GOODSON. Did you tell him about Martha Pierson?

PERRY. Did you tell him about the cattle?

ANDERSON. Did you tell him about the ads?

FISCHER. No, he hung up before I could tell him anything except they had all laid down on the job but Jess. If you take the mail today, Jess, Bill will see that you get the regular job all right. You know there's some politics in choosing the appointee from among the

highest in the examination and you're in the right party and so's Bill, and he's got a pull with the congressman. I can swear you in as temporary carrier right now.

JESS. You'll swear the devil! I'm not risking freezing to death to carry a bunch of letters to some darn farmers. I've got too good a job in the garage. Bill's too particular about this Route 3. Let it go today. He's quit anyway. One miss in fifteen years won't hurt 'em. The other boys didn't go, did they?

FISCHER. Sure they went.

JESS. Well, they're damn fools.

[*Enter RALPH with mail pouches.*]

RALPH. Yes, that's what I'd 'a' thought once, but after you're with it you see it different.

DOC GOODSON. Ralph, can't you skip the regulations once and take Route 3? He can, can't he, Sherm? You haven't anything important to go.

RALPH. How do I know, Doc? I can't tell what's in these mail sacks. They've got to go.

GEORGE. Hop to it if you want to. It's not for me.

HANK. You don't get any thanks for it.

RALPH. Don't you believe it. [*Begins wrapping up and putting on mail pouches.*] Those people out there swear by us. They're waiting for us now, 'phoning down the line as far as they can to ask if we're coming. They're getting ready to meet us at the big drifts and have something hot to drink at the box, and if night catches us or we can't go on or come back, every house out there's got a hot supper and a good bed for us.

JESS. Well, not for mine.

DOC GOODSON. Boys, I don't know just what the pay is on this route, but I'll give ten dollars extra to the one that will take the mail this morning. Herbert Pierson's wife has got to have that medicine.

PERRY. Yes, and I'll give ten more.

JESS. Well, one of you guys go. You ain't got nothing else to do.

HANK. Why, God Almighty, man, I wouldn't ride that twenty-five miles in this blizzard for twenty-five dollars a mile. Why, a man would freeze to death stuck up on a horse with a half bushel of mail around his waist.

JESS. Well, Sherm, it wouldn't pay me. I'll make ten dollars today in the garage. George, you take it.

HANK. Sure! You were the first one down here.

GEORGE. Oh, I might not get the route if I did go. I'm not in Bill's party.

HANK. I'm not either. That's the trouble nowadays; you got to have pull for everything.

PERRY. [*sharply, a little angry*] Well, here's your chance to get it. I know Bill Snyder. He'll pull for the man that's got nerve enough to take this mail this morning.

JESS. Oh, I don't know, I stand pretty well with the county chairman.

DOC GOODSON. Well, if the mail isn't going, I'll have to get somebody to take that medicine out. Can I get it back, Sherm?

FISCHER. Sure.

PERRY. I'll pay half of it, Doc, and have him stop at Ward's and tell Charley about the cattle. Who do you suppose we can get?

FISCHER. It's somebody's duty to take this mail.

GEORGE. Duty, hell!

[*Enter BILL SNYDER. He is a small man, white-haired, bronze-faced, and wrinkled. He is as straight as an arrow, and his keen blue eyes show a man of iron nerve. Though over sixty-five, he has a face of fifty and a walk of thirty. He speaks clearly and sharply. Of all those who have come*

in he is the only one who doesn't go to the fire shivering with the cold. He speaks as he comes in.]

BILL SNYDER. Who's taking the mail on Route 3?

ANDERSON. Why, here's Bill. Bill, there's a —

PERRY. Bill, I've got a —

DOC GOODSON. Bill, Martha Pierson needs —

BILL. Which one's taking it?

FISCHER. Can't get anybody, Bill. The fellows that wanted it yesterday and day before don't want it this morning.

DOC GOODSON. Bill, I wish —

PERRY. It's just the day —

BILL [*making an impatient gesture and paying no attention to the men who are trying to tell him their troubles*] George? Hank?

GEORGE and HANK. No.

BILL. Jess, don't you want the route?

JESS. Not this morning.

BILL. You're going, ain't you, Ralph?

RALPH. Bet your life.

BILL. Mack and Grant gone?

RALPH. Just left, and I've got to start. My horse will freeze standing out there. Fight it out, you boys. [*He adjusts his pouches and goes out into the storm.*]

BILL [*to FISCHER*] My mail up?

FISCHER. Yes, the boys put it up yesterday, and I put up number 19. [*BILL whirls on his heel and goes into the mail room.*]

ANDERSON. I'll give Bill five dollars if he'll take that mail this morning.

DOC GOODSON. I'll give ten.

PERRY. So will I. [*BILL comes out of mail room strapping on mail pouches.*]

BILL. You sent in my resignation yet, Sherm?

FISCHER. [*taking out paper*] No, here it is.

BILL. Give it here. [*He takes the resignation, tears it in two, and tosses it into the waste basket.*]

HANK. Now what the devil does that mean?

PERRY. That means you won't be a rural route carrier.

ANDERSON. But see here, Bill, what about the job in the store? I thought you was going to work for me.

BILL. Work? This is my work! You boys needn't mind about that examination. Route 3 mail goes.

[*He goes out. The others look after him for a minute, the curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN



PAUL GREEN

THE NO 'COUNT BOY¹

By Paul Green

CHARACTERS

PHEELIE

ENOS, *her beau.*

THE NO 'COUNT BOY

AN OLD NEGRO WOMAN

TIME. Several years ago.

PLACE. Before a farmhouse in eastern North Carolina.

The scene is the small yard immediately before a Negro cabin. At the right front is a thick lilac bush with a bench beside it, and to the left from this a clumpy china tree with a rocking-chair under it. At the left rear is a well, roughly boarded up, a chain and battered tin bucket hanging from a crosspiece above. In the back is the cabin. Rickety steps lead up to the door in the center. It is an afternoon late in summer.

PHEELIE, a neat Negro girl of seventeen, is sitting on the bench by the lilac tree looking through a book. She is dressed in cheap clothes — a white dress, white shoes and stockings.

Presently there is the sound of an approaching buggy in the lane off at the left and a voice calls, "Whoa!" PHEELIE listens a moment and then, without turning her head, gives it a toss and goes on fingering the leaves of her book. ENOS

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comes in at the left and stands watching her. He is a short stocky Negro of twenty or more, dressed in a faded gray suit and black felt hat. His celluloid collar and scarlet tie shine out brilliantly against the black of his face.

ENOS. [*in a drawling voice that now and then drops into a stammer*] Well, Pheelie, heah I is.

PHEELIE. [*looking up casually*] I see you is, and you's 'bout a hour early.

ENOS. But ain't you all dressed up to go?

PHEELIE. I's dressed up, but I ain't ready to go.

ENOS. [*dubiously*] Well, suh, now — I — I —

PHEELIE. I des' put on dese heah clothes 'caze it was so hot in de house wid my work duds on. [*He takes off his hat and discloses his naturally kinky hair combed back in a straight pompadour. He waits for her to notice it, but she keeps looking straight before her.*] Set down and rest yo'se'f. [*Somewhat ill at ease he sits down in the rocking-chair and watches her.*]

ENOS. I drapped by a little early hoping — a — mebbe you'd lak to take a small drive befo' church begun.

PHEELIE. [*in the same cold voice*] Thanky, I don't believe I wants to take no drive. [*She becomes absorbed in her book.*]

ENOS. [*picking at the lining of his hat*] And I thought we mought stop by Buie's Creek and git some ice cream. [*He watches her narrowly.*]

PHEELIE. [*after a moment*] Dat'd be nice, I reckon, but I don't want no ice cream nuther. [*She is silent again. He pulls nervously at his fingers, making the joints pop.*] And I'd be much obliged if you'd quit popping yo' finger j'int.

ENOS. [*jerking his hands apart and running his fingers over his greased hair*] 'Scuse me, Pheelie. [*somewhat*

timidly, but with a hidden touch of spirit] You — you don't seem glad to see me much.

PHEELIE. You didn't have no date to come over heah a hour befo' time.

ENOS. [*worried*] I knows it. But whut's de matter wid you? You ain't mad at me, is you?

PHEELIE. No, I ain't mad.

ENOS. Seems lak you'd druther look at dat old book dan talk to me.

PHEELIE. Mebbe I had.

[*He feels his tie, twirls his hat, and spits softly through his teeth off to one side.*]

ENOS. Whut sorter book is it, Pheelie?

PHEELIE. Whut difference do it make to you? You ain't int'rested in no book.

ENOS. 'Speck dat's right. But you sho' seems mo' tuk wid it dan anything I ever seed you have befo'.

PHEELIE. It's a fine pitchture book.

ENOS. Whah'd you get it?

PHEELIE. Dis mawning I was up to Mis' Ella's helping her hoe out de gyarden, and she told me a whole heap 'bout de places she and Mr. Jack went when dey was married. And she give me dis book dat showed a passel of things.

ENOS. Hunh, dey had money to travel wid and enjoy deirselves.

PHEELIE. She said one place dey went to was some sorter Falls or something lak dat, whah de water poured over in a great river and made a racket same as de world was busting up.

ENOS. Dat ain't nothing — mostly talk, I bet a dollar.

PHEELIE. [*closing the book with a bang*] Dat's whut you allus says. You don't care a straw 'bout gwine off and seeing things.

ENOS. [*sharply*] Ain't I done tol you, honey bunch, we ain't gwine have no money to be traipsing round de world, not yit nohow.

PHEELIE. Don't you honey me no mo', I tells you.

ENOS. [*amazed*] Whut'n de name of Old Scratch ails you? Ain't I gut a right to honey you? and you engaged to me!

PHEELIE. Engaged to you! It's you engaged to me.

ENOS. Aw right, I's engaged to you den, and you knows mighty drot'n well I's glad to be too. Dey ain't no put-on wid me.

PHEELIE. I reckon you is glad. But mess wid me and you won't be engaged to nothing.

ENOS. [*pleadingly*] Now, Pheelie, you better th'ow dat book in de far and come on and le's go foh a drive, it's stirred you all up. Come on, I's gut a mess of news to tell you:

PHEELIE. I ain't gwine on no drive. And I's 'bout decided not to go wid you to no meeting tonight nuther.

ENOS. [*alarmed*] Lawd, don't talk lak dat. Heah I's been waiting all de week foh dis Saddy night, and you ain't gwine back on me, is you?

PHEELIE. [*softening*] But, Enos, you's so samey, allus satisfied wid whut you has. You des' gits my goat.

ENOS. [*humbly*] If you means I ain't tuk wid no wild idees or sich 'bout trips way off yonder to see folks making fools of deirselves, den I is samey. But you listen heah, chile, dey ain't no meracles and sich off dere lak what you thinks. Onct I spent a good five dollars gwine on a 'scursion to Wilmington, and dey wa'nt a thing to see, not ha'f as much as dey is on dis heah farm.

PHEELIE. You gut to have eyes to see things. Some folks is natchly bawn blind.

ENOS. [*placatingly*] Well, mebbe when we's merried

we'll take a little trip to Raleigh or Durham and see de street cyars and big buildings.

PHEELIE. But I wants to go furder, clean to de mountains and right on den mebbe.

ENOS. 'Y craps, must think I gut a can of money buried somewhah.

PHEELIE. I don't nuther. Us could hobo, or walk part de way, des' fool along.

ENOS. [*laughing*] Hobo! Us'd hobo right into some white man's jail, dat's whut. And dey ain't nothing to dat walking business. We'd be a purty sight wid our feet blistered and somebody's bulldog tearing plugs out'n — well, you knows whut.

PHEELIE. [*ignoring his reply*] Setting dere looking through dat book I gut plumb sick and tar'd of you and all dis farming and sweating and gitting nowhah — sick of everything. And des' looking at old lazy Lawrence dancing over the fields made me want to puke.

ENOS. [*eyeing her*] Honey chile, de last time I was heah you said you'd lak it working in de fields wid me and keeping de house and sich.

PHEELIE. I will, Enos, I reckons I will. But dat dere book set me to wanting to go off and git away.

ENOS. [*moving his chair over to her*] Listen to me. I knows I ain't fitten to breave on you, but I's gwine do my best by you. And whut you reckon? Mr. Pearson done tole me today dat he's having de lumber sawed to build our house. September she'll be done; den you'n me kin have business — kin see de preacher.

PHEELIE. Mr. Pearson's good to you awright.

ENOS. Ain't he! Dat's a man whut is a man. And it ain't all foh me he's building dat house. He laks you and says he'll be glad to have you on his place.

PHEELIE. [*with signs of interest*] Whut kind of house is it — des' a shack wid a stick-and-dirt chimley?

ENOS. [*jubilantly*] Now I was des' a-hoping you'd ax dat. No, suh, it ain't no cowshed you could th'ow a dog through de cracks — nunh — unh. It's gwine be a nice frame house wid a wide po'ch, and it'll be ceiled. And listen heah, it's gwine have wallpaper. And, honey, Mr. Pearson said he wanted you to come up a-Monday and help choose de pattern. [*He looks at her delightedly.*]

PHEELIE. [*her face brightening somewhat*] Oh, dat's so nice of you and him! [*She bows her head.*]

ENOS. Whut's de matter now?

PHEELIE. [*looking up with tears in her eyes*] You's too good to me, Enos, and I hadn't ort to allus be so on-satisfied.

ENOS. Sho', never mind now. [*He puts his arm around her.*]

PHEELIE. [*letting her hand rest on his hair*] Grannys alive! you done spent money to git yo' hair straightened.

ENOS. [*with a kind of shamed joy*] Yeh, yeh, I has. But it was to celebrate a little.

PHEELIE. Dat's th'owing away a dollar and a half. In a little bit it'll be kinky ag'in.

ENOS. Course it will, but I thought you'd lak it while it lasts.

PHEELIE. [*laughing*] You sho' is a proud nigger. [*She kisses him quickly and stands away from him.*] Nunh — unh, I ain't gwine do it no mo'. [*He drops reluctantly back into his seat and she sits again on the bench.*]

ENOS. [*after a moment*] You want to take dat little drive now?

PHEELIE. I mought, I guess.

ENOS. [*slapping himself*] Hot dog, den le's go, honey!

PHEELIE. [*brightly*] Lemme shet up de house and we'll be ready. Muh and Pap and all de kids is over to

de ice cream supper at Uncle Haywood's befo' preaching.
[*She starts up.*]

ENOS. [*standing up*] Aw right, honey babe. I sho' laks to see you jollied up. And I's gut anudder surprise foh you too.

PHEELIE. [*stopping*] You has?

ENOS. [*mysteriously*] Unh — hunh. But I'll tell you a little later.

PHEELIE. Naw, suh, tell me now — please.

ENOS. [*anxious to tell it*] In course I cain't stand out ag'in' you. Well, we ain't gwine drive behime no flopyured mule dis time.

PHEELIE. We ain't! [*She starts towards the left to look out.*]

ENOS. Naw, suh, I's driving Egyp' today.

PHEELIE. Mr. Pearson's fine hoss!

ENOS. [*grinning*] Yeh, yeh, sho' is. I worked hard all de week, and dis mawning he come to me and axed me if I didn't want Egyp' to haul you wid tonight.

PHEELIE. [*looking off*] Dere he is. Ain't dat fine, and is he safe?

ENOS. Safe! Safe as a cellar. But, Lawd, he kin burn de wind!

PHEELIE. Goody-good. Now come help me shet de house.

ENOS. [*as they go off at the left rear*] Mr. Pearson knows I ain't gwine beat his stock and bellows 'em lak some de niggers. I tells you, sugar lump, if we stays wid him and do right, some dese days we gwine have money to take dem dere trips you wants to.

[*They have hardly disappeared when a slender Negro youth of sixteen or seventeen, barefooted and raggedly dressed in an old pair of overalls, shirt, and torn straw hat, comes in at the right front and stands staring after them. He is whittling a green walking*

stick. In a moment he pulls out a small mouth organ and begins playing a whirling jig.]

ENOS. [*coming back around the corner*] Who's dat playing to beat de band? [*He and PHEELIE come back into the yard. PHEELIE stares at the boy in delighted astonishment. Suddenly he winds upon a high note. As he beats the saliva out of the harp against his thigh, he bursts into a loud joyous laugh.*]

PHEELIE. Lawd, you kin play. Who is you?

ENOS. [*with a touch of authority in his voice*] Whut you want heah? I ain't never seed you befo'.

BOY. [*in a clear childish voice, as he looks at PHEELIE*] You ain't?

ENOS. Naw, I ain't. Whut you mean walking up in people's yards and acting lak you was home?

BOY. I thought I mought get me a drink from de well dere.

PHEELIE. Help yo'se'f. [*He draws water and drinks. ENOS and PHEELIE watch him.*]

ENOS. [*in a low voice*] I bet he's some boy run away from home. Mebbe a tramp, I dunno.

PHEELIE. Dat boy a tramp! Hunh, he ain't no sich.

ENOS. I bet you on it. Looks s'picious to me.

BOY. [*returning from the well and wiping his mouth with his sleeve*] I thought I mought git a bite to eat heah mebbe. [*He looks from one to the other, a lurking smile in his eyes.*]

PHEELIE. [*uncertainly*] You mought.

ENOS. Lak as not de lady wants to know whah you come from and whut yo' business is befo' she 'gins to feed you.

BOY. [*looking at PHEELIE*] Would you?

PHEELIE. Yeh. Whut's yo' name?

BOY. [*laughing and blowing out a whiff of music*] Mostly I ain't gut no name. [*beating the harp in his hand and scratching his leg with his toe*] 'Way 'way back

down dere [*pointing indefinitely behind him*] whah I come from some of 'em calls me Pete, but mostly dey calls me de No 'Count Boy.

ENOS. Why dey call you dat fo'?

BOY. [*laughing again*] 'Caze I don't lak to work in de fields.

ENOS. Uhn — hunh, unh — hunh, I s'picioned it.

BOY. S'picioned whut?

ENOS. Aw, nothing. Anyhow dat's a good name foh you, I bet. Whose boy is you and whah'd you come from 'way back down dere as you calls it?

BOY. [*quickly*] Cuts no wool whose boy I is. As foh whah I come from, I cain't tell you, bo, 'caze I dunno hardly. [*hesitating and pointing off to the right*] You see whah de sky come down to de earf — 'way, 'way yonder?

ENOS. I sees it.

BOY. [*grinning to himself*] Well, I come from miles and miles beyont it. [*a kind of awe creeping into his words*] Lawd, Lawd, how fuh has I come?

PHEELIE. You been all dat distance by yo'se'f?

BOY. Sho' has. And whut's mo' I walked it every jump. [*Again he draws the harp across his lips in a breath of music, all the while watching them with bright eyes.*]

ENOS. Whah you gwine?

BOY. Des 'gwine.

PHEELIE. You mean you ain't got no special place in mind — you des' hoboing along?

BOY. Dat's it, I reckon.

ENOS. How does you git yo' rations — beg foh it?

BOY. I pays foh it when I kin git 'em. Times I goes hongry.

ENOS. [*looking at him keenly*] You ain't got no money, has you?

BOY. [*cunningly*] Dat's awright. I pays foh it des'

de same. [*He stops and looks at PHEELIE with big eyes.*]
You's purty as a pink, ain't you?

PHEELIE. [*turning away her head*] Why you ax dat?

ENOS. [*sharply*] You needn't be thinking you gwine git yo' supper on soft talk, hoss-cake.

BOY [*still looking at PHEELIE*] Whut's yo' name?

PHEELIE. My name's Ophelia, but dey calls me Pheelie.

BOY. [*staring at her admiringly and cracking his palm against his thigh*] Dawg-gone! des' lak me foh de world. I's named one thing and dey calls me anudder.

ENOS. [*with a hint of uneasiness*] Heah, I 'specks you better be gwine on up de road. Me'n Miss Pheelie's des' ready to go out foh our afternoon drive, and we don't want to be bothered wid nobody's no 'count boy.

BOY. [*his face falling*] I hates to hinder you, Miss Pheelie, and cain't I git nothing t'eat — a 'tater or anything?

PHEELIE. I 'speck I could give you a snack in yo' hand right quick.

BOY. No sooner said'n done, I hopes. And I pays you foh it too.

ENOS. [*almost sarcastically*] Gut yo' pockets full of silver and gold, apt as not.

BOY. Naw, suh, I gut something better 'n new money. Heah she is. [*holding up his harp*] I plays you a piece or two pieces or three, and you gives me a bite and whut you pleases. [*In mock seriousness he pulls off his hat and addresses them.*] Ladies and ge'men, de fust piece I renders is called "De Dark-eyed 'Oman." It's music 'bout a 'oman whut had three little boys, and dey tuk sick and died one June n'ight whilst de mocking birds was singing. And allus adder dat dey said she had a dark shadow in her dark eyes. [*He clears his throat, spits once or twice, and lays the harp gently to his lips.*

Closing his eyes, he begins to play. ENOS stirs about him as the notes flood from the boy's mouth, and now and then he looks questioningly at PHEELIE's averted face. The boy's nostrils quiver, and he makes a sobbing sound in his throat. Tears begin to pour down his cheeks. After a moment he winds up with a flourish.]

ENOS. [*gruffly*] Lawd Jesus, dat rascal kin blow!

BOY. [*looking at PHEELIE as he wipes his eyes*] I hope you don't mind. Every time I blows dat piece I cries.

[*PHEELIE glances up with moist eyes.*]

PHEELIE. I sho' don't mind. Whah you learn dat?

BOY. It's a made piece.

ENOS. Who made it?

BOY. Me.

ENOS. [*ironically*] Hunh, you mought!

BOY. [*his face troubled*] You believes I made it, don't you, Miss Pheelie?

PHEELIE. Dat I do.

BOY. [*his face clearing*] Aw right den. And I'll play you anudder piece foh dat snack of grub.

PHEELIE. Dat one's enough to pay.

ENOS. You sho' you didn't git no rations down de road?

BOY. Not nary a chaw.

PHEELIE. Ain't you had nothing all day?

BOY. Nothing but some branch water and a little bitsy bird I killed wid a rock and fried. [*His face takes on a sober look, and tears again glisten in his eyes.*]

ENOS. [*looking at him in astonishment*] You sho' is a quare fellow.

BOY. [*staring up at the sky*] Dat little bird was singing so sweet and ruffling his breast in de wind, and I picked up a rock an des' th'owed devilish lak, never thought I'd hit him. But dat's de way it is — when you thinks you won't, you does, and I kilt him.

PHEELIE. And den you et him?

BOY. [*wiping his eyes on his sleeves*] I was so hongry den, and I built a speck of fire and baked him. [*wretchedly*] Won't it better foh me to eat him dan foh maggits to git at him?

PHEELIE. 'Twas dat.

BOY. [*mournfully*] But I sho felt bad 'bout dat little bird. I cain't git his chune out'n my haid. He sot on dat limb and would give a long call and den a short one — [*imitating on his harmonica*] des' lak dat.

ENOS. You's a mighty big fellow to be crying over a bird, seems lak to me.

PHEELIE. Enos, you quit dat making fun.

BOY. When I come through de creek back dere, a good-god was pecking in a high daid tree, and he turnt his haid sideways and hickered at me. I heahd him say he gwine ha'nt me foh killing dat bird.

ENOS. I swear! [*PHEELIE gives him a cutting look, and he stops his laughing.*]

BOY. I've hearn dat dem good-gods is old women turnt to birds 'caze de was weeked. And you see dey's still gut on little old red caps.

PHEELIE. Dey won't hurt you.

ENOS. Pshaw, dey ain't nothing but great big sap-suckers.

BOY. How you know? Des' de same dis'n scolded me foh th'owing dat rock. I could tell it in his talk and de way he looked at me.

PHEELIE. You didn't mean to do it nowhow, and you was hongry too. Now play us some mo'.

BOY. I 'speck mebbe den it's aw right, I 'speck so. Now I plays you my udder piece to pay you plenty foh my eatings.

PHEELIE. 'Tain't dat, 'tain't dat. We laks to heah you. I'll feed you foh nothing.

Boy. Well, listen to dis, folkses, dis moan song. [*He again pulls off his hat and makes his stage bow.*] Ladies and ge'men, dis is a talking piece I's gwin render. It's 'titled "De Coffin Song," and tells 'bout a nice gal whut went away from home all dressed out in white and died, and dey sont her body back to her Muh and Pap. Dis heah's de Coast Line coming down de track on a dark and rainy night wid her coffin on boa'd. [*He closes his eyes and begins blowing the choo-kerr-choo of a starting train. He intersperses his blowing with short speeches.*]

De rain is beating on de window panes and everybody is mo'nful. [*The choo-kerr-chooing takes on a sobbing note, and the speed of the train increases.*]

De old man and de 'oman is at de station waiting foh deir daughter's body, her dey loved so well, oh, her dey loved so well. "Don't cry, honey, she gone to heaven," de old man say. "Lawd, Lawd," de old man say. Den he heah dat coffin-blow. [*A long mournful wail of the engine's whistle follows, swallowed up in the growing speed of the locomotive. He opens his eyes and begins to chant forth his bits of dialogue.*]

Now she's balling de jack 'cross de river trustle. [*He quivers and sings with the straining timbers of the bridge.*]

Heah she is passing by de gravel pit. How she goes by, how she goes by! Lak a great black hoss, a great black hoss! And now she's blowing foh de crossing. [*The whistle moans again.*]

Her Muh and Pap's on de flatfom at de station and dey feel deir hearts in deir moufs at de crying of dat train, Lawd, Lawd, de crying of dat train! [*Again he gives the coffin-blow, long and heart-breaking.*]

De train she slow up. [*The choo-kerr-chooing slowly stops.*]

Dey takes out de coffin and flowers and puts her in a huss, and dey all drives off slow, slow, lak dis. [*He plays a sort of dead march and stalks back and forth across the yard.*]

Den de next day dey takes her to de graveyard, de lonesome graveyard. And de preacher preach — shout hallelujah — de preacher preach and de people sing, shouting glory to de lamb. And den dey 'gin th'ow dirt in on her. [*He imitates the thump, thump of clods falling on the coffin.*]

Den de favver and muvver and sisters and bruvvers all cry out loud. Her Pap cries lak dis. [*He gives forth a long deep groan.*]

And de sisters and bruvvers lak dis. [*A medley of weeping sounds.*]

And de muvver cry lak dis. [*A high piercing shriek.*]

And den dey roach up de grave and de preacher make prayer — “Lawd, Lawd Jesus, have mercy upon us!” Den dey all go off and dey ain’t nothing left ’cepting a crow in a high scraggly pine a-saying: [*He mingles his music with a raucous h-a-r-r-c-k, h-a-r-r-c-k.*]

Den adder dat when night come, dark and rainy night, de last thing is a small wind in de bushes lak dis: [*A trembling flute-like note rises, bubbles and disappears. He beats the harp against his hand and looks uncertainly at ENOS and PHEELIE, the tears wetting his cheeks.*]

ENOS. [*presently*] I cain’t deny you gut de world beat handling dat baby, but whut’n de name o’ God makes you cry so much?

BOY. [*watching PHEELIE’s bowed head*] When I plays dat piece I feel so lonesome lak I cain’t help crying, I allus cries.

ENOS. I’s seed folks cry when deir people died, but, Lawd, I never seed no sich cry-baby as you.

BOY. You’s hard-hearted. Look at Miss Pheelie, she’s crying.

ENOS. Help my life! Whut ails you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE. [*hurriedly drying her eyes*] Don't make no fun of me, Enos. I des' had de blues ag'in.

ENOS. [*patting his hat anxiously*] Heah, don't you git to feeling dat a-way no mo', honey. Le's go on wid our drive.

BOY. You calls her honey!

ENOS. Dat I do. She's my gal, dat's whut. And listen to me — I don't want no no 'count fellow come piddling by wid a harp and wild talk to git her upsot.

BOY. [*unhappily*] I didn't know you was her man. I — I thought she was too purty and lak a angel foh dat. [PHEELIE looks at him tearfully and he gazes back warmly.]

ENOS. [*angrily*] Look out, nigger, mind whut you's up to!

PHEELIE. Enos, you quit talking to dat boy lak dat.

ENOS. [*coming up to her and catching her by the arm*] Come on now, and let dat fellow go on whah he's started.

PHEELIE. [*springing up*] Turn me a-loose. He's gwine stay right heah if he wants to and eat and sleep to boot.

ENOS. [*hesitating a moment and then flaring out, his timidity and slowness gone*] De hell you say! [*He turns suddenly towards the boy and points off to the left.*] You see 'way, 'way yonder in de west whah de sun is setting in de tops of dem long-straw pines?

BOY. [*questioningly*] Yeh, yeh, I sees it.

ENOS. [*moving towards him*] Well, I wants you to git in dat road and in three minutes start dere.

PHEELIE. [*putting herself quickly before him*] He ain't, I tells you.

BOY. [*emboldened by PHEELIE's protection*] You means you wants to run me off befo' I gits any rations?

ENOS. I don't keer whedder you gits any rations or not. I wants you to leave heah befo' you gits Pheelie

all tore up wid yo' foolish notions. [*snapping*] You better git from heah!

BOY. [*swinging his stick before him and smiling with weak grimness*] Ah — hah — I ain't gwine. [*ENOS makes another step towards him.*] Don't you come towards me. I'll split yo' haid open wid dis heah stick. [*ENOS stops and eyes him cautiously. The boy holds his stick in trembling readiness.*]

PHEELIE. [*getting between them*] I tells you, Enos Atkins, you ain't gwine harm nary a hair of dis boy's head. You do and I'll scratch yo' eyes out apt as not.

ENOS. God A'mighty! done hyp'otized wid him a'ready, is you? [*in a wheedling tone*] Now, boy, cain't you see how 'tis wid me? We was des' ready to go off to church, and heah you pops up and sets yo'se'f in 'twixt us. [*He feels in his pockets and pulls out a dollar.*] Heah, take dis dollar and go on. You kin buy enough grub wid it to last you a week.

BOY. [*breaking into a loud derisive laugh*] Ain't he a sight trying to har me off from his gal!

ENOS. Dem dere laughs is lakely gwine be tacks in yo' coffin. [*The boy closes his eyes in merriment. With a quick movement ENOS snatches his stick from him.*] Now see'f you don't strak a trot up dat road. [*He puts out his arm and pushes PHEELIE back. Egypt is heard off the left pawing the ground and shaking his bridle.*] Whoa, Egyp'!

BOY. [*half whimpering*] Don't hit me wid dat stick.

ENOS. I ain't gwine hit you if you lights a rag out'n heah dis minute. Scat, or I'll wring yo' neck. Make yo'se'f sca'ce, nigger.

PHEELIE. Let him 'lone, let him 'lone, I tells you!

BOY. You better go tend to yo' hoss, bo. I heah him trying to git loose.

ENOS. [*looking appealingly at PHEELIE*] Egyp's gitting

restless, Pheelie. You 'bout ready to be driving now? [*He steps to the left and calls.*] Whoa! whoa dere, Egyp'! Come on, Pheelie, and le's go.

PHEELIE. [*shaking her head determinedly*] I ain't gwine on no drive wid you, and dat's my last say.

ENOS. Oh, hell fiah! [*He lowers his stick. At the left he turns and speaks.*] You des' wait heah, you little polecat, and I'll fix you yit. [*He hurries out.*]

BOY. [*turning boldly back into the yard*] Hunh, dat nigger ain't nothing but bluff.

PHEELIE. And he ain't gwine make you leave nuther. You stay right wid him.

BOY. He thinks you's gitting to laking me, dat's whut he thinks. [*He falls to staring at her intently.*]

PHEELIE. Why you look at me lak dat?

BOY. [*shyly*] How old is you?

PHEELIE. Seventeen.

BOY. [*joyously*] Is? Den we's des' de same age. Cain't — cain't I call you Pheelie?

PHEELIE. [*looking at the ground*] Yeh, yeh, you kin.

BOY. I feels des' lak I knowed you all my life, and I ain't never seed nobody lak you in all my progueings, nobody — and I's travelled a heap too.

PHEELIE. And you's seed a monstrous lot whah you travelled, ain't you? Yeh, you has, I bet.

BOY. I has dat — Lawd, Lawd!

PHEELIE. [*dropping into the rocking-chair*] Has you seed any big rivers and waters and sich?

BOY. Rivers! Lawd, yeh!

PHEELIE. Has you been by a place whah a great river pours over a steep hill roaring lak de judgment day?

BOY. [*dropping on his knees and marking in the dirt as he ponders*] I dunno — Yeh, yeh, dat river was two miles wide, and you had to stop yo' yurs in a mile of it.

PHEELIE. Go on, go on, tell me some mo'. Has you been in any big towns?

BOY. Has I? I's been in towns dat had streets so long dey won't no coming to de end of 'em.

PHEELIE. Was dey many people dere?

BOY. People! People! [*He rolls over on the ground at the remembrance of it and then sits up.*] All kinds and sizes. People running, people walking, some wearing diamont dresses and gold shoes. Rich, my, my, how rich! Ortymobiles as big as dat house wid hawns dat jar lak a earquake and b'iler busting all at onct.

PHEELIE. [*a little dubiously*] Aw —

BOY. Hit's so. And street cyars running wid nothing pulling or pushing 'em. And buildings so high dat de moon breshed de top. High! Lawd, Lawd, how high! And people hauling money wid trains, big train loads whah dey keeps it in a big house wid a school breaking of folks to gyard it.

PHEELIE. I been looking at pitchtures in dis book, but nothing fine as dat. [*She brings the book and shows it to him.*]

BOY. [*somewhat disturbed*] Yeh, I's gut a book lak dat. [*He begins picking his teeth meditatively with a straw.*] Et was give to me by a peddling man. [*smiling wisely*] But det was befo' I went out travelling foh myself. Lawd, Lawd, 'pared to what I's seed in New Yawk dat book ain't nothing.

PHEELIE. New Yawk! You been dere?

BOY. Dat I has. She's a long ways yonder too, mebbe two hundred miles, who knows? But, Pheelie, dat's de place to go, everything easy, people good to you, nothing to do but eat ice cream and mebbe now and den drink lemonade — and see people, people! worse'n de fair at Dunn. Never seed sich a mess of people.

[*ENOS is heard quieting his horse.*]

PHEELIE. How'd you travel so fuh and pay yo' way? Must take a lot of money.

BOY. I walked, dat's how, bum my way. And when I gits hongry I plays my harp.

PHEELIE. Whah you sleep?

BOY. You don't know nothing 'bout travelling, does you? I sleeps on de warm ground. Come sunset, I stops in a hollow and breaks down bushes and rakes up pinestraw and sleeps lak a log. And in de mawning I wakes and sees de jew on everything and heahs de birds singing, and I lies dere a while and practice on my harp. Den I's off down de road breaving de fine air and feeling des' as happy as I kin.

PHEELIE. [*vehemently*] I done told Enos we could do lak dat. I sho' has told him time and ag'in.

BOY. Would you lak to live dat a-way?

PHEELIE. Unh — hunh, yeh, oh, yeh, I would.

BOY. [*earnestly*] Why cain't you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE. [*twisting her hands nervously*] I dunno — I wants to — I do wants to go and keep on gwine.

BOY. [*leaning quickly forward*] Pheelie, Pheelie, come on wid me and go tromping through de world. You kin leave dat bench-leg Enos behime.

PHEELIE. [*turning impulsively towards him and then dropping her head*] I cain't do it, I's 'fraid to.

[*ENOS slips in at the left rear and watches them.*]

BOY. I tell you we would have de best time gwine. Come on and go wid me.

PHEELIE. [*hesitating*] I — mought do it — I's half tempted to do it.

BOY. [*catching her hand*] I tells you whut — how 'bout me waiting out in de woods dere till dark comes down and den you kin put on a old dress and j'ine me?

PHEELIE. [*pulling her hand unwillingly from him*] Dat'd be fine — fine, but wouldn't folks raise cain?

BOY. Let 'em. Whut you'n me keer? We'll be splashing in de rain and shouting in de sun. And we'll step along togedder, and I'll hold yo' purty little hand and you'll hold mine, and I'll teach you to sing songs. I knows a bushel of purty ones. And den I'll learn you how to blow my harp. And we'll slip down de roads at sunrise and sunset, singing and blowing de finest chunes dey is. Please'm say you'll go wid me.

PHEELIE. [*with shining eyes*] You has de purtiest talk of any man or boy I ever seed, and, oh, I wish — wish — [*with sudden abandon*] Yeh, yeh, I will — I will, I'll go. [*Ecstatically he touches her arm and looks straight into her eyes.*]

BOY. [*cooingly*] Birdie mine, birdie mine. [*He stands up and bends over her chair.*]

PHEELIE. [*her face alight as she leans her head against him*] Oh, it makes my haid swim to think of all we's gwine see and heah. [*He timidly puts his arm over her shoulder. ENOS throws his stick behind him, springs forward, and snatches the BOY away from PHEELIE.*]

ENOS. Heah, you low-down rascal, trying to steal my gal, is you? Oh, yeh, I been heahing whut you said. [*his nostrils dilating*] And I's gwine give you a kick in de seat of yo' britches dat'll send you whah you's gwine.

BOY. [*retreating behind PHEELIE*] I ain't trying to steal her nuther. She don't keer nothing foh you and wants to go on wid me.

ENOS. Dat's a lie, you little ficey fool, and you better look out befo' I gives you de lockjaw.

BOY. She much as said she don't love you, now den.

ENOS. You didn't say dat, did you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE. I dunno whah I loves you or not.

ENOS. [*turning savagely upon the boy*] Damn yo' soul, I gut a notion to ham-string you. [*He makes a move-*

ment towards the boy, who darts over to the left, sees his walking stick, and seizes it.] You des' come heah rolling off yo' lies by de yard and tear up everything! Why don't you leave? Want me to bring out a fedder bed and wash yo' feet and sing to you and fan you and put you to sleep, does you? [*jumping forward*] I'll put you to sleep!

BOY. [*falling quickly behind PHEELIE and drawing his stick*] You make anudder move at me and I'll scrush yo' skull.

PHEELIE. [*crying out*] Enos, stop dat, stop dat!

ENOS. [*sarcastically*] Yeh, and who's you to order me — you lost every ray of sense you ever had! Wouldn't you be a purty fool running off wid dis heah woods-colt and sleeping in de jambs of fences and old hawg beds and scratching fleas lak a mangy hound! [*his voice rising high in wrath*] Dat you would. And in winter weather you'd have yo' shirt tail friz to you hard as arn. You'd be a sight for sore eyes!

PHEELIE. Shet up. — Boy, I wouldn't let him call me no woods-colt.

BOY. [*weakly*] Don't you call me dat.

ENOS. [*taking off his coat*] Call you dat! I ain't started yit. I's gwine twist off bofe yo' yurs and make you eat 'em widdout no salt. Hell, you ain't gut no mo' backbone dan a ground-puppy.

BOY. [*trembling and clinging to his stick*] Pheelie, Pheelie, don't let him git at me.

PHEELIE. Don't you hurt dat boy, I tells you ag'in.

ENOS. [*laughing brutally*] Hurt him! I's gwine crucify him. [*He begins circling PHEELIE. The Boy keeps on the opposite side. ENOS reaches out and pulls PHEELIE behind him.*] Now, my little son of a gun, whah is you?

BOY. [*in desperation raising his stick*] Don't you

come neah me. [ENOS makes a dart at him. The Boy starts to flee, but as ENOS clutches him, he turns and brings his stick awkwardly down on his head. ENOS staggers and falls to his knees.]

PHEELIE. [looking on in amazement a moment and then screaming] Lawd, you's kilt Enos! [She stands in uncertainty, and then runs and holds him to her.]

BOY. [in a scared voice as he drops his stick] Muhcy, whut's I gwine do? Is — is you hurt, Enos? [ENOS groans.]

PHEELIE. Git out'n heah, you, you. You's murdered my husband. Enos, Enos, honey baby, is you hurt bad? [He groans agains and she helps him to a chair.]

ENOS. [twisting his head from side to side] Hurt? Nothing but a little crack. Dat lizard ain't strong enough to kill a flea wid a sledge hammer. [He suddenly whirls around and runs his tongue out, snarling at the Boy.] Ya-a-a-h! [The Boy bounds backwards and, tripping over the bench, falls sprawling on the ground.] See dere, blowing my breaf on him th'ows him into fits. [The Boy lies stretched out still.]

PHEELIE. Oh, my Lawdy, you — I believes he's daid or something!

ENOS. [trying to hide his fear] Sho' nothing but de breaf knocked out'n him.

PHEELIE. [shrilly, as she bends above the boy] He's hurt, I tells you. Po' boy. [turning towards ENOS] Whut if you's kilt him?

ENOS. [rubbing his head] Shet up, he ain't hurt bad.

PHEELIE. You hateful mule-beating rascal, he is hurt. [moaning over him] Oh, my sweet honey-boy.

BOY. [sitting up] Lawd, dat fall jarred de wind out'n my stomach. [suddenly getting to his feet and eying ENOS fearfully] Don't let dat man make at me.

PHEELIE. I don't reckon he will. You gi'n him a dost to last foh a while.

ENOS. [*standing up*] A dost! Hunh, he cain't faze me wid no little tap on de skull. [*He begins rolling up his sleeves. There is a hail off at the right front.*] And now I rolls up my sleeves foh de hawg-killing.

PHEELIE. You all stop dat rowing now. Yonder comes somebody. [*The Boy reaches down and gets his harp out of the dirt.*]

ENOS. Who is dat? Some old 'oman in a steer cyart.

BOY. [*looking up hastily*] Lawd Jesus, dat's — who's dat! Hide me, people, hide me quick so's she cain't get to me. [*He looks around him in terror.*] Whah must I go?

PHEELIE. Why you scared of her?

BOY. Pheelie, put me somewhah, civer me quick!

PHEELIE. Drap down on yo' knees, she's coming up de paf. Better git behime de house mebbe.

BOY. [*on his all-fours*] And if she axes foh me, don't you tell her.

PHEELIE. We'll tell her we ain't seed hair nor hide of you. But I cain't see why you so tore up. [*He crawls rapidly off at the left rear around the house.*] Now, Enos, you keep yo' mouf closed. Dey's something up — dat boy 'fraid so.

ENOS. Dey is something up, and my s'picions is coming to de top.

OLD WOMAN. [*calling off the right front*] Heigho!

PHEELIE. Heigho! [*A stout old Negress, dressed in rough working clothes, comes in at the right. She carries a long heavy switch in her hand with which she cuts at the ground as she talks.*]

OLD WOMAN. How you all come on?

PHEELIE. Well as common, and how does you?

OLD WOMAN. Well, I thanky. I's looking my boy — seen anything of him?

PHEELIE. [*slowly*] Whut sorter boy?

OLD WOMAN. Lawd, take me all day to gi'n you a pitchture of him. He's des' de no'countest fellow ever was bawn. He goes round playing a harp, and he's not des' right in his haid. He talks wild 'bout being off and travelling everywhare and he ain't never been out'n Hornett County. Gut all de mess out'n pitchture books and sich. [*A delighted grin begins to pass over ENOS's face. PHEELIE looks dejectedly at the ground.*]

PHEELIE. [*in a choked voice*] I ain't seed him no-whah.

OLD WOMAN. [*watching her closely*] I whupped him t'udder day 'caze he so sorry, and he run off. And when I ketches him dis time I's gwine cyore him foh good and all. You say you ain't seed him?

PHEELIE. [*looking up*] Naw'm.

OLD WOMAN. [*eyeing her*] Dat's quare. I thought I seed somebody lak him standing heah in de yard. Last house down de road said he passed dere a hour ago, and dey ain't no road to turn off.

PHEELIE. [*persistently*] Naw'm, I ain't seed him. [*Unseen by PHEELIE, ENOS makes a signal to the WOMAN that the BOY is behind the house. Looking off.*] Mebbe he went by when we won't looking. [*The WOMAN darts around the house and is heard crying out.*]

OLD WOMAN. Ah — hah — heah you is, heah you is!

PHEELIE. How'd she find out he's dere? [*There is the sound of blows followed by loud crying.*]

ENOS. Listen at him cry, de baby!

PHEELIE. [*who has started towards the rear*] Quit yo' laughing. [*She chokes with sobs.*] You set her on him, dat's whut you done. And I'll help him out, she shain't beat him so. [*She meets the OLD WOMAN coming in leading the BOY by the collar. He is crying like a child.*]

OLD WOMAN. [*yelling at him*] Dry up! [*He stops his sobbing and looks off ashamed.*] Now ain't you a mess to be running off and leaving me all de cotton to chop! [*looking around her*] Well, we's gut to be moving, and I's gwine gi'n you a beating whut is a beating when you gits home.

ENOS. Whah you live?

OLD WOMAN. Down neah Dukes.

ENOS. Oh-ho, I thought mebbe from yo' boy's talk you was from New Yawk or de moon or somewhah.

OLD WOMAN. I be bound he's been lying to you. He cain't tell de truf. De devil must a gut him in de dark of de moon. [*She brings the switch across his legs. He shouts with pain.*] Step on now! [*He struggles against her and holds back.*]

BOY. Pheelie, Pheelie, help me, cain't you?

PHEELIE. [*raising a face filled with wrath*] Help you! Dat I won't. [*coming up to him and glaring in his face*] You dirty stinking rascal, why you fool me so?

OLD WOMAN. [*giving him another cut*] You put a move on you, or I'll frail de stuffing out'n you. [*They move off towards the right front, he looking back and holding out his hands to PHEELIE.*]

BOY. Pheelie, don't turn ag'in me so. Pheelie! [*They go out.*]

ENOS. [*going up to PHEELIE*] Honey, don't — don't be mad now. See, if it hadn't been foh me, apt as not you'd a-let dat little fool gut you to gwine off wid him. [*PHEELIE bursts into wild sobs. He pulls her head against his breast, but she shakes herself from him. The loud voice of the OLD WOMAN is heard outside.*]

OLD WOMAN. You git in dat cyart or I'll Pheelie you!

PHEELIE. I don't want — I ain't never gwine to speak to you ag'in! Oh, he's done gone! [*She runs to the right and calls down the road.*] Heigh, Boy! Boy!

BOY. [*his voice coming back high and faint*] Pheelie-ee-ee!

[PHEELIE falls on the bench, sobbing in uncontrollable grief. ENOS stands looking at her with a wry smile while he gingerly rubs his bruised head. After a moment he goes over to her and puts his arms around her. They are still around her when the curtain falls.]

THE ORGAN ¹

By
Kenyon Nicholson
and
G. Edward Pendray

CHARACTERS

HENRY PETERSON, *a homesteader*

MYRA, *his wife*

MARVIN, *their son*

CALVIN JASPER

MRS. CALVIN JASPER

TUDE MEEKER

MRS. TUDE MEEKER

JOE WESTON

ELMER FLAMMER

JIM LANGDON

COL. OKAYNE, *the auctioneer*

THE CLERK

A group of homesteaders

SCENE. *The front yard of the Peterson homestead in eastern Wyoming. At left stands the house — weather-beaten and dilapidated. To the right, though not in sight, are the barn, sheds, and corral. At back may be seen the open prairie, gently rolling and bluish purple with sagebrush. A barbed-wire fence which seems to enclose all the*

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buildings is visible. The ground about the house is beaten bare by the tramp of feet, and on it is piled furniture in great confusion, just as it has been carried from the house. It is awaiting public sale by auction. Chairs, beds, bedding, a sewing machine, a tin washtub, an old dresser, a kitchen stove with utensils, etc., are in the collection. Somewhat by itself, near the wall of the house, stands a shiny golden oak upright organ of the kind advertised in the mail order catalogues. It is open, and a copy of the Methodist hymnal is upon the music rack. A three-legged upholstered organ stool stands some distance away with the other furniture.

TIME. Early afternoon of a hot summer's day.

AT RISE. From the direction of the barn come the sounds of an auction sale: the auctioneer with his singsong, the staccato bark of an occasional bidder, the undertone of conversation. These offstage noises continue intermittently until the entrance of the auctioneer and the crowd.

MYRA PETERSON is discovered seated beside the organ in a straight-backed chair. Her hands are folded helplessly in her lap and she is staring blankly in front of her. She is gaunt, gray-haired, not over forty, but hard work and privation have taken their toll. After a few moments MARVIN PETERSON, an undersized, anemic boy of about fifteen, comes out of the house carrying a dining-room chair which he places with the others. He is dressed in overalls and is barefooted.

MARVIN. There, Maw, that's all the chairs.

MYRA. [*listlessly*] All right, Marvie.

MARVIN. You a-settin' out here like a gypsy!

MYRA. We are gypsies now, ain't we? We ain't got no home.

MARVIN. We'll have one soon as Paw gits back to Des Moines. He'll get took back into the shops. No use worryin' about it —

MYRA. Bein' sold out ain't jist a picnic. . . .

MARVIN. I know, Maw, but they can't nothin' be done about it now.

MYRA. [*almost to herself*] I never thought I'd see the day. . . . I figgered somethin'd turn up. . . . I been fearin' this fer a year — an' now it's come! [*She pauses for a moment, listening to the auctioneer.*] I hope it don't take 'em long. I feel kind of faint.

MARVIN. [*looking toward the barn*] They's a good crowd. Paw says stuff ought to go perty high.

MYRA. Lot of good that'll do us! The money all goes to pay debts an' back taxes. Here we been workin' hard fer years to make this place a home. I been cleanin' it up an' dustin' it up every day, an' now they're takin' it away from us, Marvie.

MARVIN. Let's not talk about it. You'll jist git started cryin' again.

MYRA. It's all I got to talk about. Look at the dining-room set there. We bought it before we left Ioway. An' that dresser. Yer grampa gave it to me when yer Paw an' I first started housekeepin'. That rocker yonder's been in the Loomis family fer three generations. I recollect seein' my maw rockin' in it, an' her maw before her.

MARVIN. We'll git together some more things better'n them when we git back to Ioway. [*boastingly*] I kin git me a job, too, an' —

MYRA. [*hopelessly*] We'll never git such stuff together again. How'd we ever git enough money to buy another organ? I jist can't bear to see that organ go, Marvie. Right when you're doin' so well with yer music, too!

MARVIN. [*sobered*] I'll sure miss it to play on.

MYRA. Every time you come back from yer lesson over at Mule Creek I could notice you improvin'. There ain't hardly a hymn you don't play now. It

wouldn't be long 'til mebbe you could play good enough to git a job as a musician.

MARVIN. Maybe in one of them pitcher shows Miz Jasper's always sayin' she seen over in Cheyenne —

MYRA. But *now* what chance you got? They're takin' the organ!

MARVIN. Don't you think mebbe when we git settled in Des Moines —

MYRA. We might git another organ? We'll be lucky if we git enough to eat. We'll never git another organ like that again. [*She sighs. Both are quiet a moment.*] Marvie, git the organ stool an' play me a piece. It'll comfort me.

MARVIN. Aw, Maw, I don't feel like it now — with all them folks down at the barn.

MYRA. Play soft — they won't hear you.

MARVIN. I can't play very soft.

MYRA. It'll prob'ly be the last time I'll ever hear you play the organ, Marvie. [*pause*] Do it fer me. [*MARVIN reluctantly carries the stool to the organ and sits down.*]

MARVIN. What you want to hear, Maw — a hymn?

MYRA. [*brightening*] Play that last piece Miss Simpson give you.

MARVIN. "The Jolly Hunter's Polka"?

MYRA. [*casting a glance toward the barn*] That's the one. You know most of it by heart. Jist don't pump too hard, Marvie.

[*MARVIN begins laboriously to pick out the first notes. MYRA listens as one entranced. He is halfway through the "piece" when HENRY PETERSON enters hurriedly from the direction of the barn. He is about fifty years old, with unshaved face, faded patched overalls, and an old blue*

shirt rolled up at the sleeves and open at the neck — a broken man with defeat written in his face and voice.]

HENRY. Marvin! Stop that! Ain't you got no sense? [MARVIN stops playing at once, turning on his stool.]

MYRA. What's the harm in him playin'? I ast him to.

HENRY. With all them folks down at the barn! I'm s'prised at you, Myry.

MYRA. What do I care about them!

HENRY. Now don't be so high-strung, Myry. You oughta went to town like I wanted, an' waited 'til it was all over.

MYRA. It's my things they're sellin', same as yours. You're stayin' to see yer cattle an' implements done right by: I'm stayin' to see my house an' furniture done right by.

HENRY. [*with the trace of a whine*] It makes it harder to stand — with you here, Myry.

MYRA. I reckon we'll both have to stand it, Henry.

HENRY. I don't see why you think so much of this place, anyhow. It ain't what you was brought up to. [*shaking his head*] I been an awful poor provider, Myry.

MYRA. Don't blame yerself. If I hadn't of been in the hospitle so long, we might of got a little ahead.

MARVIN. Now, Maw, quit talkin' so! It wasn't yer fault no more'n anybody else's. It jist happened.

HENRY. That's right. We jist had bad luck. Crops failed, an' there was the fire, an' the cow market dropped —

MYRA. An' me in the hospitle.

HENRY. Well, everything'll come out all right.

MYRA. All these years I been prayin' it would — but it never has.

HENRY. We're goin' back to Des Moines, an' then everything'll be better.

MYRA. [*in a dead voice*] Yes, we're goin' back to Des Moines an' start in again right where we did fifteen year ago.

HENRY. Don't worry about it. We'll git a new start —

MYRA. A new start! That's what you're allus sayin'! We can't do it, I tell you. We're too old, an' I ain't got no heart fer it. A new start! What we got to start with? Furniture gone, cattle an' farm tools gone, an' our spirits gone. They're even takin' Marvie's organ. It ain't fair! It ain't fair, an' if you was half a man, Henry Peterson, you wouldn't let 'em!

HENRY. [*seeing MRS. WESTON and MRS. MEEKER*] Hush up, Myry! Here comes some one.

[*There enter from the direction of the barn MRS. TUDE MEEKER and MRS. JOE WESTON. MRS. MEEKER is a stout woman, clad in pink gingham — evidently her Sunday best. Her hair is coiled back in a knot on her head, and a black straw hat trimmed with ancient red cherries perches on it. MRS. WESTON is tall and angular. Her clothing has no frills or decoration. Her head is protected by a sunbonnet. Both women are ill at ease, endeavoring to be kind to an old neighbor who has met with misfortune.*]

MRS. MEEKER. Well, Myry, they're about through down there. An' the farm things are a-goin' right high, too.

MRS. WESTON. My Joe jist bought yer plow team, Henry.

HENRY. I'm glad, Ella. He'll not work 'em too hard like some folks. That's allus been a good team to me. I remember once when I —

MRS. MEEKER. The sun's right warm here, Myry, an' you without no hat! I allus miss the shade-trees in this homestead country. I say to Tude, "Wyoming'd be all right if we could only grow some trees like we had back in Illinois."

MRS. WESTON. Here, Myry, take my bonnet. [*removing her sunbonnet.*] You'll git sunstroke if you ain't careful.

HENRY. She can go in the house.

MYRA. I wouldn't feel right, a-settin' inside without my furniture. I'm goin' to stay right here.

MRS. MEEKER. [*sympathetically*] I know jist how you feel. It's hard. We was sold out in Illinois. You don't never want to see the inside of your house again.

MRS. WESTON. I kin jist imagine, Miz Meeker.

[*MARVIN has left the organ stool, and is slipping off quietly in the direction of the barn.*]

MYRA. Where you goin', Marvie?

MARVIN. Down to the barn.

MYRA. You be careful, with all them horses millin' around in that old corral! [*MARVIN goes out.*]

HENRY. Reckon I'd better be gittin' back. [*to the others*] Look after Myry, will you?

MYRA. I don't need no lookin' after.

HENRY. Col. Okayne ain't goin' to be much longer. . . . [*He shambles off toward the barn, almost apologetically.*]

MYRA. [*to the women*] Set down, won't ye? Plenty of chairs. . . .

MRS. MEEKER. Myry, we thought we'd come ahead to tell you. That Miz Jasper's come out to git yer organ.

MYRA. Miz Jasper . . . !

MRS. WESTON. [*sitting*] She's tellin' everybody that's what her an' her husband come to this sale fer.

MYRA. What does she want with an organ? She don't play.

MRS. MEEKER. She's goin' to git Miss Simpson over at Mule Creek to give that Leroy boy of her'n lessons.

MRS. WESTON. The little sissy ought to learn how to do something. If he was mine, I'd have him in dresses.

MYRA. He'd never learn as quick as Marvie does. Miss Simpson says Marvie's got a gift fer it.

MRS. MEEKER. It's a shame an' a disgrace he can't go on learnin' to play.

MRS. WESTON. That's what I say!

MYRA. I wisht you'd heard him a while ago. He was playin' that new piece Miss Simpson gave him, "The Jolly Hunters." It sounded sweet as church music. [*tearfully*] An' just to think mebbe he won't ever git to play again. . . .

MRS. MEEKER. There, Myra — I wouldn't take it so hard.

MRS. WESTON. [*looking toward the barn*] Here comes Miz Jasper now! Don't let her see you cryin', Myra.

MRS. MEEKER. Look at the fancy clothes on her! I'd like to know what they got, to put on such airs! [MYRA *hastily dries her eyes.*]

MRS. WESTON. That's what comes of seein' too many toorists go by. I say to Joe, "I'm glad we ain't direckly on the highway," I say —

[MRS. CALVIN JASPER *comes in. She is a pudgy woman with reddish skin and thick ankles who seemingly has the delusion that she is pretty. She is dressed in a blue skirt, too small for her broad hips, high button shoes, and a white shirt-waist. She carries a palm-leaf fan.*]

MRS. JASPER. Hullo, Miz Peterson! I sorta thought you'd be in town.

MYRA. I ain't the sort to run away.

MRS. JASPER. No, I s'pose not. Whyn't you have yer sale in the mornin', when it's cooler?

MRS. WESTON. Afternoon's as good as any.

MRS. JASPER. 'Course when you have it in the afternoon you don't have to serve 'em lunch.

MRS. MEEKER. If anybody's small enough to want free lunch, let 'em stay away, I say.

MRS. JASPER. [*looking around*] Oh, *there's* the organ! Cal's goin' to buy it for our Leroy.

MRS. WESTON. You can never be *too* certain you'll git a thing when it's up at auction.

MRS. JASPER. Well, we're ready to bid with the next one. [*She goes over to inspect the organ, while MYRA stifles an involuntary motion to prevent her.*]

MRS. WESTON. I wish we could afford an organ. Joe spends all his extry money on our radio.

MRS. JASPER. [*examining it closely*] One of your ivory keys is loose, Miz Peterson.

MYRA. [*coldly*] It don't affect the music none.

MRS. MEEKER. If I'm any judge, it's a good insterment. Good as new . . .

MRS. JASPER. [*shaking the stool*] This here ain't none too solid. My husband'll have to glue it together again. [*pumping the bellows and trying a note or two*] It ain't very loud, is it? I like organs lots louder.

MYRA. It was good enough for us. We had it goin' on five years.

MRS. JASPER. [*airily*] Well, you can't expect to git much fer it — the shape it's in.

MYRA. [*flaring up*] Nobody's askin' you to buy it!

MRS. JASPER. You needn't git so short with me, Miz Peterson.

MYRA. Besides, I — I don't know as we want to sell it.

MRS. JASPER. I don't see how you can help yourself. It's a sheriff's sale, an' everything has got to go.

MRS. WESTON. 'Tain't none of your business, Miz Jasper!

MRS. JASPER. [*fanning herself*] Well, you needn't git so smart, Miz Weston. I guess it's my business if I want to bid on this organ.

MRS. MEEKER. There'll be other bidders. You ain't the only one got a chance to git it.

MRS. JASPER. I reckon my Cal is prepared to bid as high as the next one. You can't bluff him, once he makes up his mind about anything. We'll see who gits it!

MRS. MEEKER. [*her arm about MYRA*] If it's all the same to you, Miz Jasper, would you mind goin' back to the corral? Yer gettin' Miz Peterson all upset.

MYRA. Never mind about me.

MRS. JASPER. Oh, very well. I thought this was a *public* auction. I didn't know you couldn't say your mind! I thought it would be doin' Miz Peterson a favor to take that old organ off her hands! [*She flounces off toward the barn.*]

MYRA. I can't stand to see her git it! It's *my* organ. Her Leroy don't need it. We bought it for Marvie, an' it's his by right!

MRS. WESTON. Chances are *she* won't git it. She jist likes to talk.

MRS. MEEKER. That husband of her'n is awful bull-headed once he gits an idee. . . .

MRS. WESTON. She ain't allowin' fer other folks outbiddin' him.

MYRA. Bid or no bid, she don't git it. *I made up my mind!*

MRS. WESTON. If I was you, Myry, I wouldn't make no trouble. It don't do no good in the long run.

MYRA. They's some rights a body has, auction or no auction.

[HENRY comes in from the direction of the barn.]

HENRY. Myry, they're about through down there, an' Col. Okayne wants to know if you're ready fer him to start sellin' the stuff up here?

MYRA. I reckon I'm as ready as I'll ever be.

MRS. MEEKER. We'll stay by her, Henry.

HENRY. That's neighborly of you, Marthy. She's so high-strung.

MRS. WESTON. I'd like to know who wouldn't be high-strung at a time like this!

MYRA. Never mind about me. I'm all right. [*suddenly*] But they ain't goin' to git Marvie's organ!

HENRY. What you talkin' about, Myry?

MRS. MEEKER. Miz Jasper allows she's goin' to git the organ fer her Leroy.

HENRY. Well, if she pays the price . . .

MYRA. [*doggedly*] She ain't goin' to have it, d'ye hear me?

HENRY. Talk sense! You sound like you was out of your head.

MYRA. Maybe I am.

HENRY. The organ's got to go, along with the rest of the truck. You don't seem to realize this is a sheriff's sale.

MYRA. What do I care about the sheriff? It's Marvie I'm thinkin' of! We got the organ fer him. It's his organ! We ain't got no right to sell Marvie's organ, jist when he's learnin' to play on it!

[HENRY is about to remonstrate with her when the crowd is heard approaching from the barn.]

HENRY. Now you behave, Myry. They're a-comin'!

[COL. OKAYNE, the auctioneer, comes in, followed by some twenty or thirty homesteaders, including TUDE MEEKER, JOE WESTON, ELMER FLAM-

MER, JIM LANGDON, MR. and MRS. CALVIN JASPER, and the CLERK. *The COLONEL is a very large man in a shiny black suit and broad felt hat. He carries a hickory stick. The clerk follows at his heels, with a square pad upon which the sales are recorded. The homesteaders are all talking at once. The women stand more or less together, except for MYRA, who keeps her place by the organ. MARVIN crosses to his mother and takes her hand. The auctioneer greets MYRA perfunctorily and raps his stick on the table top for silence. The crowd subsides as he begins to talk.*]

COL. OKAYNE. Here we are, folks! All you need to set up housekeepin'! Young fellers, here's where you git that start in life. You supply the girl, an' we supply the rest. Nothin' could be fairer. All this here furniture is in A-one shape, folks, an' absolutely guaranteed to be as represented. Look it over all you please!

[At this invitation several advance and paw over the furniture in a half-hearted fashion, rather ill at ease in the presence of MYRA. COL. OKAYNE takes advantage of the lull and deposits a huge chunk of chewing tobacco in his mouth.]

THE CLERK. Colonel, are the terms same as they were at the barn?

COL. OKAYNE. Yep, same thing. Same thing. *[louder, to the crowd]* Now, folks, if you've had your look around, let's get down to cases. As I said down yonder, we're all sorry to see the Petersons sold out, but what has to be has to be. What's one man's loss is another's gain. It's the way of life! *[He pauses a moment, clearing his throat importantly and assuming his professional voice.]* Now, folks, the terms of this sale is same as they was at the barn, with this leetle exception: Everything in the lot sells for cash. Them's

the usual arrangements with house furniture in small sales, an' them's the arrangements here. Everything goes to the highest bidder, an' folks, I'm goin' to sell this stuff fast! It's gittin' late, an' all of you has got cows home waitin' to be milked. Any questions about this sale? [*pauses*] All right, then! [*He mounts a chair and begins calling for bids in his wooden, singsong voice, hoarse and strident from long ill-usage. Occasionally he uses his hickory stick for emphasis.*] This stuff's goin' cheap an' fast. Somebody's goin' to git some rare bargains here. Think fast an' act accordin'. What'll we put up first? As the feller says, "If you don't see what you want, ask fer it." Call out what you want to bid on first. I'm at your service!

A NEIGHBOR WOMAN. [*calling out*] The sewing machine!

TUDE MEEKER. The dinin' table!

CAL JASPER. The organ!

ELMER FLAMMER. The bed!

COL. OKAYNE. Wait a minnit! Wait a minnit! Not so fast. One at a time. All right, Elmer, we'll take the bed first — just to please you.

JOE WESTON. I seen Elmer out ridin' with a girl in his new flivver!

JIM LANGDON. [*in a falsetto voice*] Oh, you Elmer!

COL. OKAYNE. Never you mind, Elmer. We was all young once. [*confidentially*] Y'know, folks, Elmer's plannin' about gittin' married. Now, then, folks, the bed. Bounce them springs. Look at them legs. Genuine golden oak, folks. Bid on it, covers an' all. The quilt goes too. It's a good bed, ain't it, Miz Peterson?

MYRA. We've had it since we was married. Got it fer a weddin' present from Henry's Paw. That quilt belonged to —

COL. OKAYNE. [*impatiently*] Well, somebody start

it. What am I offered? How about you, Elmer? What do I hear for this lot?

ELMER. [*guiltily*] Two dollars.

COL. OKAYNE. What! Two dollars? For a bed like that? Wouldn't pay for the varnish on it! Two I'm bid, two. Who'll make it five? Five. Five. Five. [*A homesteader shouts "Five!"*] I've got five. Who'll make it ten, make it ten, make it ten? — Don't you people sleep at night? Step up an' examine it. You act like you was scared it'd bite! [*A few do as COL. OKAYNE suggests. Another homesteader holds up seven fingers.*] That's more like it! Seven is bid. I've got seven. Seven. Now, Elmer! Say ten. Make it ten.

ELMER. Eight!

COL. OKAYNE. I've got eight. Eight. Eight. Eight. Honest, folks, I don't believe you know a bargain when you see one! This han'some bed an' covers fer eight dollars! Eight, I'm bid. Eight. No higher? Last call! All done? I'm bid eight — once. Eight — twict. Eight — [*striking his stick against the side of the chair*] Sold! To Elmer Flammer fer eight dollars. An' with it, Elmer, goes my wishes fer a long an' happy life.

[*The crowd relaxes and stirs about. ELMER advances to the clerk to pay for his purchase. The auctioneer shifts his chew from one cheek to the other and takes a reef in his snakeskin belt in preparation for the next sale.*]

COL. OKAYNE. Look at this here wonderful chiffonier with the beveled glass in it. Almost bran' new. Looks like what you see in the Sears-Roebuck catalog. Take this home to yer wives, men, an' it won't take 'em so long to git dressed of mornin's. What you say we auction it off next, folks?

MRS. JASPER. Colonel, put up the organ next.

COL. OKAYNE. The organ?

CAL JASPER. My wife an' me got to start back perty soon, an' we want to bid on the organ.

COL. OKAYNE. Anything to oblige. I'm here to accommodate the public. You all heard? Cal Jasper's asked a chance to bid on the organ. The organ goes next.

MYRA. No, no! [*There is a stir of interest.*]

HENRY. Hush, Myry!

MYRA. Well, she ain't goin' to git it! [MARVIN *puts his arms about her.*]

MRS. JASPER. Go ahead, Colonel — put up the organ.

MYRA. [*half pleading*] It belongs to Marvie, an' it's his'n by rights.

COL. OKAYNE. [*glibly*] All right! Miz Peterson says it's her son's own personal insterment, an' her guarantee of tone purity an' mechanical perfection goes with it.

[COL OKAYNE *gets off the chair and helps the clerk push the organ into better position for inspection. A woman in the crowd whispers something to him.*]

COL. OKAYNE. What's that, lady? Yep, the stool sells with the organ. You bet! An organ without a stool would be like a tom cat without a tail. [*He laughs loudly at his joke, and pumps the bellows, striking a few keys.*]

TUDE MEEKER. [*jocosely*] Play us a tune, Colonel!

JIM LANGDON. He couldn't carry a tune in a bucket!

COL. OKAYNE. [*ingratiatingly*] That's one on me, boys. Truth is, I couldn't. But you ought to hear me on a fiddle . . . [*mounting the chair again*] As the feller says, "Music has charms to soothe the savage beast." — Take this melodeon home fer your women.

folks, fellers. It's the chanct of a lifetime to git such an insterment, mellered with age — an' here's a religious hymn book goes with it. You git yer music an' religion together, all fer the price of one. All right, now, bid fast! Who'll start it? Who'll say ten?

[MYRA *steps in front of the organ defiantly, her face bloodless with excitement, her voice harsh and determined.*]

MYRA. I tell you, you ain't goin' to sell it!

[HENRY *hurries to her side, and tries to pull her away.*]

COL. OKAYNE. What's that, Miz Peterson?

MYRA. I ain't goin' to let you sell it!

HENRY. She don't mean nothin', Colonel.

COL. OKAYNE. Miz Peterson, the tail goes with the hide! Everything here sells, if anybody'll bid on it. Them's my orders. Sorry, but it can't be helped!

HENRY. [*trying to lead her away*] Myry, we can't do nothin'! You better go in the house.

MYRA. You leave me be! I ain't goin' to let him sell my organ.

MRS. JASPER. How you aim to keep him from it?

COL. OKAYNE. Sorry, but I take my orders from the sheriff. Everything goes, fair an' square, to the highest bidder, come one, come all! Now, folks, if Miz Peterson will kindly step out of the way, we'll —

MYRA. I won't, I tell ye! I won't git out of the way. You can't sell the organ, an' that's all they is to it!

MRS. MEEKER. [*stepping to her side*] You won't do nothin' 'cept make a scene, Myry. Come on back an' set down. [MYRA *refuses.*]

COL. OKAYNE. All right, folks. Let's not mind the interruption. Women folks is bound to git hysterical at times. It can't be helped — it's their nature. Now what am I offered to start off this melodeon? You

heered it play. It's a daisy. What am I bid to start her off?

MRS. JASPER. Go on, Cal, speak up! You ain't goin' to let her scare you out?

COL. OKAYNE. *There's a lady knows a good thing when she sees it!* Speak up, Cal. How much?

CAL JASPER. [*not too loud*] Five dollars.

COL. OKAYNE. Five is bid. Who'll make it ten? I got five. Five. Five —

MYRA. Don't none of you bid! It ain't fer sale!

COL. OKAYNE. [*flustered*] Now looky here, Miz Peterson . . .

HENRY. Myry, you wanta ruin the auction?

[MYRA mounts a chair beside COL. OKAYNE. *The crowd is hushed. HENRY hurries toward her.*]

MYRA. There's somethin' I got to say to all of ye —

HENRY. Myry, git down off'n there!

MYRA. Not 'til I've had my say! I'm goin' to tell this crowd somethin' 'fore I have to leave the country. I been a good neighbor to every one of you. There's Jim Langdon over there. I stayed up nearly every night fer a month with his wife when she had the pneumony an' like'd to died. I done her washin' besides. And Tude Meeker. Where'd you of been if we hadn't sent you butter an' milk an' truck the year hail got yer crops an' you couldn't keep no cows? Not that I b'lieve in throwin' it up to any of you — we been proud an' glad to help. That's the only way when you're homesteadin' —

COL. OKAYNE. Now, Miz Peterson, you been a good woman, but this ain't hardly the place or time —

MYRA. I ain't through yet, an' I'm goin' to finish! As I was sayin', when you're homesteadin', you got to help one another. All stick together. An' now I want somethin'. I want to keep that organ. It's all I got

to give Marvie. If he gits a chanet he'll be a big musician some day. Most of you've heered him play, an' know how well he does.

MARVIN. [*embarrassed*] Aw, maw!

COL. OKAYNE. Well, Miz Peterson, all you say is very interestin', an' I'd like to oblige you, but we already got one bid.

MYRA. [*breathlessly*] One bid! Five dollars! An' from Cal Jasper, too. I done more for Cal than I done for anybody. You ain't fergot, Cal, the time when you used to live at our house, before yer shack was built, an' how I mended yer clothes an' did yer washin's — 'fore you had this here woman to do 'em for you? We fed you an' kept you like one of our own, an' never so much as charged you a cent. An' this is how you pay me back!

COL. OKAYNE. [*after a moment*] Well, Cal, do you wanta withdraw yer bid?

MRS. JASPER. [*sharply*] I'll answer that fer him. He don't!

COL. OKAYNE. [*resuming his professional tone*] That settles it. Five dollars I'm bid fer this beautiful upright organ. Five dollars!

[MYRA becomes hysterical and breaks down completely. MARVIN and MRS. MEEKER help her down from the chair. The crowd stirs uneasily. Pretending not to notice her, COL. OKAYNE goes on with his patter.]

COL. OKAYNE. Five dollars I got, now. Five dollars. Who'll say ten? Folks, you don't know what you're missin'! Course we all feel sorry fer Miz Peterson, but business is business. The organ's worth twenty-five if it's worth a penny. I got five. Make it ten. Ten. Ten . . . [*a pause*] What's the matter, folks? You gone on a strike? [*The crowd remains stolid and silent.*]

TUDE MEEKER. Colonel, you can't git no decent man to bid on that organ after what's happened! [*He looks meaningly at CAL JASPER.*]

COL. OKAYNE. Come on now, Tude! Don't git chicken-hearted!

TUDE MEEKER. Everybody here knows what he owes Myry Peterson. We know what's right an' what's wrong, an' if Cal Jasper wasn't married to that woman of his, he'd withdraw his bid in a minit! [*There is a rustle of approval in the crowd.*]

COL. OKAYNE. But Cal ain't withdrawin' his bid, an' I'll have to sell the organ at five dollars. Folks, it's a shame to sell a fine organ like that fer five —

TUDE MEEKER. Cal, here's yer last chance to withdraw that bid an' let Miz Peterson have her organ! [*There is a tense silence. CAL JASPER thrusts out his chin.*]

CAL JASPER. I ain't to be bluffed out by nobody. If I want to withdraw my bid, I don't need to be reminded by no homesteader!

COL. OKAYNE. [*anxious to get on with the sale*] All right, then! Five I'm bid. Five dollars once —

JOE WESTON. That organ'll cost you a lot more'n five dollars, Cal. There's my seeder you borrow every spring an' my binder every fall. You'll never git the loan of 'em again!

CAL JASPER. I guess they's others!

ELMER FLAMMER. You allus count on me to help you with the thrashin'. I'll never help you again if you buy that organ!

TUDE MEEKER. Ner me! I won't help! I'll see you in hell first.

MRS. WESTON. He won't be able to hire no help nowhere. [*The crowd echoes similar sentiments.*]

JIM LANGDON. [*to CAL JASPER*] Next time that heifer

of your'n gits in my corn, I'm goin' to shoot her. I warned ye enough about her.

MRS. JASPER. You don't care about that, Cal. Let 'em talk!

TUDE MEEKER. You can't git very far without yer neighbors if you expect to stay on a homestead, Cal. You know that. Better think it over!

MRS. JASPER. Colonel, hurry up an' sell us that organ. I'm tired of hearin' all this gab!

CAL JASPER. Go ahead, Colonel.

COL. OKAYNE. [*quickly*] Five I got. Five once. Five twice —

MYRA. [*wailing*] Oh, Marvie, they're gonna sell it —

COL. OKAYNE. Three times, an' *sold* to Cal Jasper over there fer five dollars. Cal, you got a bargain! Now, folks, let's git right busy on the —

MRS. MEEKER. Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Cal?

CAL JASPER. Jist hold yer horses, Miz Meeker! [*loudly to the crowd*] Now, then, *I* got somethin' to say. I bought the organ an' it's mine. I can do what I like with it. I ought to be mad, after all you said, but I ain't. I'm goin' to give this here organ to Miz Peterson, with my compliments an' thanks fer what she's done fer me. [*He pauses a moment. The crowd shows signs of being suspicious at his sudden burst of generosity.*] That agreeable with everybody?

TUDE MEEKER. Well, I'll be damned!

MYRA. [*going to him, uncertainly*] Cal, d'you mean it?

JIM LANGDON. He knows better'n not to mean it.

JOE WESTON. You ain't foolin' nobody, Cal. You're just doin' that to save your face!

MRS. JASPER. [*sharply*] Cal Jasper, you come home. I want to talk to you.

MYRA. Marvie, you thank 'em fer both of us. They're the finest neighbors a body ever had!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

"BARGAINS IN CATHAY"¹

By Rachel Field

CHARACTERS

MISS EMILY GRAY, *an ambitious salesgirl*

JERRY O'BRIEN, *a delivery boy*

MISS DOTY, *official guardian of the book department*

THOMPSON WILLIAMS, *a poet, also of the men's wear department*

MISS BLISS, *a lady with memories*

MR. ROYCE, *a floorwalker*

A gentleman from New York

TIME. *The present, on a morning in spring.*

SCENE. *The Book Department of Thompson Williams and Company, a big department store in a city some hundred miles or so from New York. It is a small room set off from the rest of the store, with one entrance supposed to lead directly to the main floor, and the one at the opposite side, marked "Employees Only," leading to a back staircase. The walls have built-in bookshelves, all filled with volumes in new covers. There is a desk in one corner; several stiff chairs, and a large table centre, upon which are arranged piles of new books and magazines.*

When the curtain rises, MISS EMILY GRAY, not much over twenty and very pretty and piquant, is busy at the

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table. *She has a bunch of daffodils which she is arranging in a vase among the books. One of the daffodils is stuck in her own dress, a simple affair of dark material. She hums a little tune to herself as she works, and when the last daffodil is in place, she steps back to admire the effect.*

As she does so, JERRY, a delivery-boy of about nineteen, enters by the employees' door, carrying a large package in his arms.

JERRY. [*cheerily, depositing the package on the desk*] Whew! Some load on a nice spring morning! Say, didn't you just hate to come in to this old mausoleum?

EMILY. [*pleasantly*] Well, I wouldn't have minded an hour more in the park. I brought in as much of it as I could, though. [*She points to the daffodils.*] An old man was selling them over by the gate. Want one? [*She takes one out for him.*]

JERRY. [*sticking it in his buttonhole*] Thanks.

EMILY. [*at desk, reading address on package of books*] Smith and Goodwin! [*She gives a start and betrays signs of excitement as she begins to unwrap it.*] It's what I've been waiting and waiting for. Where's it been all this time? Down in the shipping room, I suppose?

JERRY. [*shrugging*] Search me! This is the first I seen of it. It ain't my fault if one of those big bums down there's sittin' smokin' on a box so's nobody can see under, is it?

EMILY. Don't talk so loud round here, Jerry. You know Miss Doty's likely to come in any minute.

JERRY. Well, let her. The old girl's nothing in my young life!

EMILY. [*lifting out a pile of new books, which she begins to scan carefully as if looking for a special one*] She could get you fired tomorrow if she chose to report you,

and then what chance would you have to get transferred to the New York store?

JERRY. [*gloomily*] What chance have I got now, runnin' their fool errands at eighteen per?

EMILY. You keep right on running them and you'll get a raise by September.

JERRY. [*striking a tragic pose*] That's five months off, and my Sweetie's picked out an emerald set in platinum.

EMILY. [*smiling*] She doesn't want anything, does she?

JERRY. "Nothing less'n an emerald'll do," she says to me only last night. "Then you don't want me," I says. "What you want's some guy with ears like dollar signs!" Oh, she's a great kid. Talk about ambition — she's got it for her middle name!

EMILY. We've all got our ambitions, I guess.

JERRY. [*grinning at her*] Yeh, an' when it comes to annexin' a good-lookin' one whose dad owns half the business, I'll say you're aimin' 'bout's high as anybody round here!

EMILY. [*flushing*] For goodness sake, Jerry, don't say things like that! Some one might hear you and think —

JERRY. Everybody in the store knows he's been keen for you ever since old man Williams shipped his only little boy down here to learn the business.

EMILY. Jerry!

JERRY. [*continuing calmly*] Not that I blame him any for fallin' for you. You can hold your own in a crowd an' believe me, you're a fast little worker, even if you are so kind of quiet and *re-fined*!

EMILY. [*smiling*] And I've been trying to keep that a deep, dark secret!

JERRY. Well, murder will out, same's it says in the Bible! [*He grows suddenly serious.*] Honest though, I

don't get him. He acts all right, on the level I mean, but any guy that's as cracked over a girl as he is over you don't mind tellin' the whole world about it.

[He takes up her hand and scrutinizes the ring finger of her left hand significantly. She draws it away quickly.]

EMILY. *[lightly]* Oh, you're behind the times, Jerry. The smartest people aren't wearing them this season.

JERRY. *[sceptically]* Yeh, I've noticed that. *[earnestly]* Say, you can't bluff me that way. I've seen you lookin' at him when you thought no one saw you. Take my advice and put it up to him straight next chance you get. He's had plenty of time to make up his mind these last six months, an' if I was you I'd say to him, "See here, old dear," I'd say, "I've had just about enough of this watchful waitin' act. I'm good an' tired of watchin' you watch your step!"

[EMILY has been bringing out the last batch of books from the package, and now she breaks in with a little excited exclamation as she clasps a thin green-covered volume.]

EMILY. *[hugging it to her ecstatically]* Oh, my, it's come!

JERRY. *[a little put out]* See here, you're not listenin'. I was givin' you good advice — free.

EMILY. *[absently, as she turns the leaves]* I know, and thanks a lot, Jerry.

JERRY. *[injured]* I may look young, but I've had lots of experience if I am only nineteen. I've had girls make fools of themselves over me, an' I've made a fool of myself over girls, an' I know the game from A to Z.

EMILY. *[still absorbed in the book]* I'm sure you do. Still, Jerry, there are some things —

JERRY. *[ducking toward the door]* Your boss's comin'! Me for elsewhere!

[*He turns to leave by the employees' door. EMILY follows him.*]

EMILY. Wait, Jerry, just a minute! [*She tears a leaf from her sales book, scribbles a word or two on it, folds the paper, and hands it to him.*] Don't forget, next time you're on the third floor.

JERRY. [*pocketing the note with a knowing grin*] I get you, my Radio Girl! It shall be his, though all the store freeze over!

[*He is gone with another grin, as MISS JANE DOTY, official head of the book department, enters from the other door. She is nearing forty, and a trifle hard as to voice and feature. Although she dresses in the latest style and rather too youthfully, beside her young assistant, she looks more than her age. This is a fact of which she is well aware, and it annoys her. EMILY returns to the desk and the book, surreptitiously turning the pages.*]

EMILY. Good morning, Miss Doty. It's real springy out, isn't it?

MISS DOTY. [*removing her things and hanging them on stand in corner*] Good morning, Miss Gray. Yes, April's a very treacherous month. One minute it's freezing and the next like summer. [*noticing the vase of flowers*] Did you bring these in here?

EMILY. [*apologetically*] Why, yes, I thought they'd sort of brighten things up a little.

MISS DOTY. [*coldly*] You may put them over on that corner shelf. I can't have them here where they'll be upset likely and spill water over the books. [*She lifts vase and runs her hand over the table.*] It's a wonder none's leaked on here already. [*She hands the vase to EMILY, who carries it reluctantly to the corner, where it can hardly be seen. As she does so MISS DOTY notes the one on her dress.*] And take that one right off your

dress, please. Thompson-Williams does not allow its employees to wear flowers or jewelry. The idea is never to distract the customer's attention. Please remember that in the future.

EMILY. [*putting the daffodil with the rest*] All right, Miss Doty, I'll try to.

MISS DOTY. [*acidly*] You'll have to do more than try if you wish to remain with a first-class store like ours. When the personnel department sent you to assist me here, they gave me to understand that you were above the average clerk in intelligence, but I can't see that it's made things any easier for me so far. [*She turns to the pile of new books.*] What's all this?

EMILY. [*hurrying over, and always fingering the green covered one*] That's the new Smith and Goodwin shipment. It just came, and I've been checking up on the order. Everything's there. I've got those two Mrs. Crane wanted set aside. Shall I put the rest out?

MISS DOTY. I suppose you might as well. It'll keep you busy, and we won't have many people in this morning, not with that millinery sale on in the basement and those men's wear specials on the third. I'm going to see Mr. Penrose about next week's window display now. [*She turns to leave, and EMILY tries not to look too pleased at this. But as she goes, MISS DOTY catches sight of the green book. There are two others besides the one EMILY holds, and she peers at these disapprovingly.*] What's this?

EMILY. [*trying to sound casual*] That new book of poems by C. Martin Greenwood.

MISS DOTY. [*too cross to notice her assistant's suppressed excitement*] Looks more like a Saint Patrick's Day parade to me! [*with decided irritation*] I don't know what's the matter with Smith and Goodwin! I certainly never ordered anything like that. It's hard

enough to get rid of poetry books when they're by Ella Wheeler Wilcox or Longfellow or that Edna St. somebody — but who ever heard of this C. Martin Greenwood?

EMILY. [*eagerly*] Oh, he's had things in magazines. I've seen them. There was one in "The Circle" for March and in the Poet's Corner of "The Literary Lampost."

MISS DOTY. [*unconvinced*] Well, I don't believe anybody else read them. Smith and Goodwin have got no business palming a book like that off on me. I'll write and tell them so. Three copies, too! [*She pushes them from her with disgust.*] You can just tie them right up again and send them back.

EMILY. [*very much upset by this*] Oh, but Miss Doty, it's spring and people are lots more likely to buy poetry now than any other time of the year. Couldn't we just give it a try?

MISS DOTY. [*firmly*] I shall not keep any books I didn't order. You've got to be firm with these publishers, or they take advantage of your good nature.

EMILY. [*desperately*] The covers look so gay and different from the rest.

MISS DOTY. I should say they do! Bright enough to put your eyes out.

EMILY. [*following her as she moves to door*] It wouldn't do any harm to have them out for just one day, would it?

MISS DOTY. [*icily*] Really, Miss Gray, I can't waste any more time listening to you. I've no doubt you think you could run this department better than I can, but it just happens that I am running it and you aren't!

EMILY. [*hastily*] Yes, of course, Miss Doty, and I didn't mean —

MISS DOTY. [*sweeping from the door*] Very well, I don't wish to hear another word about them.

[*Exit MISS DOTY. After she has gone EMILY takes up the book again. She is plainly torn between her happiness in its contents and her despair that it must be returned. She turns the pages eagerly; then as she comes upon something familiar she smiles and reads aloud to herself with shy and excited pleasure.*]

EMILY. [*reading softly*]

Time goes by like endless rain;
 Spring will be summer soon;
 Other lovers have walked this way
 Under as white a moon,
 And more will follow us hand in hand
 To kiss when we are through,
 But none will be fair as you are fair,
 Or love as I love you.

[*She stops and speaks softly, incredulously.*] And he meant Me — Me! [*She hugs the book again rapturously.*

[*Here a young man enters so quietly she does not hear him. He stands watching her for a second or two as she bends over the book. He is not much older than she, very boyish and attractive, but only his own eagerness and the light in his eyes betray his poetical tendencies. This is THOMPSON WILLIAMS, son and heir to the department store.*]

WILLIAMS. [*hurrying over to her*] Emily, I came right down just as soon as Jerry gave me your note.

EMILY. [*unable to contain herself a minute longer*] Oh, Tommie, it's come! It's here in print and everything, and the cover's green!

WILLIAMS. [*kissing her after first looking to be sure they are not observed*] I hoped it would be, but

they wouldn't promise. How does it look? All right? [EMILY holds it out, and they bend over it together.]

EMILY. It's just wonderful. [She reads the title out impressively.] "Bargains In Cathay" by C. Martin Greenwood.

WILLIAMS. I almost wish I hadn't called it that — there's a bargain in men's sport wear going on upstairs now!

EMILY. Of course, I do wish you could have had your real name on it.

WILLIAMS. So do I, but what can you do when you get saddled with a whole chain of department stores? I might have managed with just plain Williams, but signing myself Thompson Williams would have been my finish before I began. Everybody would just have added "and Company."

EMILY. Well, I like C. Martin Greenwood, and it certainly does match the cover. [rapturously] Just think of its being every bit yours!

WILLIAMS. [quickly] No, it's *ours*, and don't you forget that. How many poems do you think I'd have written this last year without you?

EMILY. [modestly] Oh, I don't know.

WILLIAMS. Well, I do! [a little anxiously] Look here, are you sure you're not sorry about the ring? I got thinking about it again last night, and it didn't seem quite fair. A girl wants an engagement ring.

EMILY. [with spirit] Any girl can have a ring! It's much more thrilling to spend the money on getting your poems published. [They laugh.] It gives me the strangest feeling to see them in print. [She turns the leaves, pointing certain poems out to him.] It's like people you know acting in a play, all dressed up and shiny-looking and different.

WILLIAMS. [kissing her again] You darling!

EMILY. Sometimes it scares me a little to look at them, because it doesn't seem possible that I could be engaged to a poet — a professional poet!

WILLIAMS. [*trying not to act too proud*] You needn't be. Just remember I paid for half the printing when you feel like that! [*with forced casualness*] What did you think of the dedication?

EMILY. Why, I haven't got that far. You see I started right in the middle on that one you wrote after we came home from that hallowe'en ride. [WILLIAMS *has been turning the leaves, and now he holds it open for her benefit. She reads the inscription aloud.*] "For Miss Emily Gray." Oh, why — Oh, my! [*She is quite overcome.*]

WILLIAMS. I'm glad you like it. I wanted to surprise you. But then I wanted to ask you about it, too. Maybe you'd rather have had something a little more fancy, and it was awfully hard to decide between that and "To Miss Emily Gray." I had it that way at first and then when I thought it over it seemed as if "For" sounded more personal some way, so I telegraphed them to change it.

EMILY. I do like it better. It's a mercy Miss Doty didn't see that page, though. If she ever had — [*She sobers suddenly.*] Oh, Tom, she's going to make me send them right back, and after all that trouble I had checking the title on that order list before she sent it and everything.

WILLIAMS. [*disappointed, but trying to look as if it didn't matter*] Well, I never thought you'd be able to work it with that old she-dragon.

EMILY. I don't even dare buy this one myself; she's so suspicious.

WILLIAMS. You'd better not. You've got a specially inscribed one coming to you. [*He sighs.*] I might have known nobody'd want to buy it.

EMILY. [*quickly*] They will, too! I'd make them, only how can I if I have to send them back?

WILLIAMS. [*gloomily*] I guess dad was about right when he said it wasn't any use manufacturing goods people didn't want. I remember he said if he could find just one sane person who'd be willing of his own free will to spend good money for a book of my poems, he'd let me chuck the store and give me a try at writing.

EMILY. Well, we'll show him.

WILLIAMS. [*shaking his head*] You wait, you haven't met dad yet! [*He sighs even more profoundly*] Lord, I wish sometimes I didn't want to do it. But it gets me — just like the drink. If it was only something simple and natural like that, maybe I could get away with it! It would all be so easy if I didn't want to write. I'd pitch right in and learn to run the business the way dad wants me to and we could get married tomorrow. That's the worst of it, Em — say the word and I'll sign up for life.

EMILY. [*with spirit*] You won't do anything of the kind. You'd hate it, and we'd both be miserable. We'll just have to wait a while longer. Look at all you've done in the last year — had two poems in magazines and a whole book of them published.

WILLIAMS. Some days I don't feel as if I'd ever be able to do another — not up there selling men's wear and taking measures for coats and *pants*. [*He makes a face at the last word.*] They never call them anything but "pants" on the third floor. Why if any one came in and asked for trousers, I wouldn't know how to act, it's so long since I've heard the word!

EMILY. [*half sad, half amused*] I know you hate the third floor, but it can't last forever.

WILLIAMS. [*gloomily*] No, I'll get transferred to the furniture department or something.

EMILY. [*comfortingly*] Your father's bound to come round when he sees your book. [*with sudden resolve*] Tom, I'm *going* to sell it, you'll see. Miss Doty won't be back for an hour anyway, and some one's sure to come in, if it is Monday morning!

WILLIAMS. Well, good luck to you, dear; you can do it if any one can. Only remember, fair play now; you're not to buy it yourself.

EMILY. I'm going to prove that people *do* want poetry.

WILLIAMS. [*taking another look at the book*] The one about "Sparrows and Skyscrapers" looks well, doesn't it? Only they didn't get it quite right. I had it read — "Spears clash on blue" and they've made it — "Clear splash of blue," and that doesn't mean a darned thing.

EMILY. [*sympathetically*] That's a shame, but [*brightening*] you can fix it all right in the next edition.

WILLIAMS. [*groans*] Five hundred copies in this, and not one sold yet.

EMILY. We can't tell.

WILLIAMS. I can. [*He gives her another hasty kiss and prepares to leave.*] Well, back to the sale on sports suits and pants again. Goldstein'll be raising the roof if I don't show up. I'll slip down here next chance I get.

[*He takes another look at his book and at EMILY and then hurries out through the employees' door.*

EMILY sighs, picks up the book, and with an air of determination places it prominently in the center of the table, the others one at either end. She plants herself near the door and waits hopefully. Presently she is rewarded by the appearance of a customer, an elderly lady with glasses and a preoccupied air. She is of the retiring spinster type, but not aggres-

sive like MISS DOTY or farcical like the old maids of comic supplements. Indeed there is something very appealing about her, and her clothes, though shabby and homemade, are not in the least freakish.

EMILY fairly overwhelms her with attentions.]

EMILY. Good morning, Miss Bliss, you haven't been in for a long time. I hope you haven't had the "Flu" or anything?

MISS BLISS. [*absently*] Why, no, I don't think so. Let me see, what was it I wanted? [*She begins to fumble in her bag for a list and extra eyeglasses.*]

EMILY. [*prompting her*] A book.

MISS BLISS. Yes, a book. I remember now — a detective story.

EMILY. [*trying to conceal her surprise and disappointment*] A detective story? For yourself?

MISS BLISS. [*explaining*] Why, yes, you see I get sort of restless these nice spring nights. I'm all alone now. Sister Annie's gone, and you can't always count on the neighbors dropping in. Of course there are the movies, but you can't go every night.

EMILY. [*sympathetically*] No, and they only change the bills twice a week.

MISS BLISS. [*going on carefully*] Besides, I don't seem to sleep very well, and I thought maybe if I had something real lively and entertaining to read —

EMILY. I see.

MISS BLISS. Have you got any good new ones in? I like those about stolen gems and heroines getting carried off and rescued from gangs of crooks the best, but I don't mind a good murder mystery now and then.

EMILY. [*to gain time*] Now you just sit down here and rest a minute while I see what we have. [*She draws up one of the chairs to the table center. MISS BLISS seats herself in it. EMILY points to the book of poems and tries*

to speak casually.] These are some new books that just came in this morning. They're not the kind you want, but you might like to glance over them. [*handing her the poems*] These are some very unusual poems. I think every one feels like poetry in the spring, don't you?

MISS BLISS. [*vaguely*] I don't know but what you're right.

EMILY. [*pointedly*] People who are really poets at heart are always restless at this time of the year, I've noticed.

MISS BLISS. [*with new interest*] Is that so? Maybe that's why I — [*She breaks off modestly.*] Of course, I never wrote a line of poetry myself. No, the nearest I ever came to it was meeting a poet once.

EMILY. [*with a flattering show of interest*] Did you really, Miss Bliss? Where?

MISS BLISS. [*reminiscently*] In Boston one time when I was visiting Cousin Laura. She took me to a meeting of "The Daughters of Zion" or something over at her church, and there was a poet recited some of his poems.

EMILY. [*leading her on*] Oh, who was he?

MISS BLISS. [*rambling on sentimentally*] Why I can't just seem to remember his name. It must have been more'n thirty years ago, but he was a beautiful young man. I sat in the front row in a new blue poplin dress with black polka dots. He kept looking at me all the time, and afterward when I was introduced to him he said I'd — I'd been an inspiration to him. [*hastily*] Of course, I expect he was just trying to be pleasant.

EMILY. I'm sure you must have been. [*opening book and feeling her way cautiously*] I suppose some of those he read were love poems?

MISS BLISS. Yes, as I remember there were a good

many of that kind. He certainly did make them sound lovely.

EMILY. [*handing her the open book*] I was reading this one just before you came in. It's rather nice, don't you think?

MISS BLISS. [*still under the spell of her own brief venture into romance, begins to read.*]

Time goes by like endless rain;
Spring will be summer soon;
Other lovers have walked this way
Under as white a moon—

[*Her voice grows fainter, but she continues to read on in an undertone. EMILY stands watching her breathlessly till she is through. MISS BLISS looking up.*] H'm, 'tis kind of pretty — specially that part about Time. I've often thought that's how it is, only I'd never have been able to say it that way.

EMILY. [*eagerly*] That's what I always think about poets, too! They can say all the things people think and don't know how to say themselves.

MISS BLISS. [*pleased to be so flatteringly agreed with*] I wasn't sure I made myself plain.

EMILY. Oh, perfectly. [*pointedly and with emphasis*] Well, I must really hunt up that detective story for you. [*She goes over to a near-by shelf and pretends to look.*] Now about how much did you want to pay?

MISS BLISS. [*hesitating*] Why, I don't know exactly. I thought maybe I could get something under a dollar-fifty. But books seem to get more and more expensive nowadays.

EMILY. Yes, it's awful the way they're going up. You can hardly get one under two dollars any more. [*with sudden inspiration*] I was certainly surprised to see how reasonable those poems are — only a dollar twenty-five, and with a cover like that, too.

MISS BLISS. [*doubtfully*] It's kind of bright, I think.

EMILY. [*desperately*] Well, so are leaves and grass. Why shouldn't books be?

MISS BLISS. That's so.

EMILY. [*convincingly*] And a book stays just the same all the year round — outside and inside, too!

MISS BLISS. I never thought of it like that before, but it's true.

EMILY. Of course it's true. That's why people ought to be so careful about the books they buy and not get ones they'll grow tired of and only want to read once.

MISS BLISS. [*eyeing her admiringly*] There's a lot in what you say, only if a person hasn't very much money to spend — [*She puts the poems down regretfully.*]

EMILY. [*weighing her words with care*] I was just thinking — but of course I don't usually suggest things to customers —

MISS BLISS. Oh, I'd like — I mean I enjoy talking with you. That older lady who's here, she's so short she always kind of rattles me, but you take such an interest.

EMILY. [*drawing a deep breath and coming over to the table*] Well, what I thought was this — maybe you could have them both, the poems, I mean, and the detective story, too.

MISS BLISS. [*hesitating*] Oh, I'm afraid that would be pretty expensive and I really oughtn't —

EMILY. [*eagerly*] You don't need to get a detective book, when there's a whole *magazine* full of mystery stories for twenty-five cents! [*She gets out a copy of "Detective Stories," displaying it enticingly.*] There are all sorts of them in here, so you'd be sure to get the kind you like. It would really be better, and then you'd have a dollar and a quarter left for the poems.

[*She pauses for breath and waits anxiously while MISS BLISS considers the proposition.*]

MISS BLISS. [*taking up the poems again*] That's quite an idea. It would look nice on my parlor table. [*explaining*] It stands between the windows, and the lilacs are just beginning to bloom outside.

EMILY. [*enthusiastically*] What a wonderful place to read poetry! [*nervning herself for the great moment*] Shall I — shall I wrap them up together for you?

MISS BLISS. [*handing over the book*] Why, yes, you might. [*as Emily rushes to tie them up before she has a chance to change her mind*] You're sure those detective stories are good ones?

EMILY. [*busy at the desk wrapping the book*] They ought to be. The night-watchman reads it to keep awake. [*tying the string in a handsome bow*] Shall I charge them or will you pay?

MISS BLISS. [*fumbling in her bag*] Oh, I'll pay. [*She counts out the exact amount as EMILY brings the package to her.*]

EMILY. [*handing it to her*] Thank you. Oh, wait a minute. [*She goes over to the vase in the corner, takes out a daffodil and tucks it under the strings of the package.*]

MISS BLISS. [*protesting*] Oh, you mustn't, really.

EMILY. [*smiling*] It's all right, we're giving one away as souvenir with every copy sold.

MISS BLISS. [*turning to go*] What a lovely idea. [*She turns to go out.*] I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you for taking so much trouble about the book.

EMILY. Don't mention it, Miss Bliss.

[*Exit MISS BLISS smiling vaguely to herself. EMILY gives a delighted caper to express her feelings and hurries to make out her cash sales slip and then arranges the two remaining books in the most conspicuous place on the center table. She goes to the door and peers out hopefully. Seeing some one coming, she steps back. It is evidently*

some one she knows and dislikes, for she makes a wry little face. For a second she hesitates; then as an idea comes to her she hurries to the chair by the table, seats herself in it, opens the poems, and is apparently completely absorbed in them as a smartly dressed young man enters. He is of the floorwalker type, sleek, well-groomed and good-looking with an exaggerated idea of his own charms. EMILY is aware of his every move, but she continues to read on in assumed absorption until he is beside her. Suddenly he grabs the book from her hands. Throughout this scene she is quite evidently acting.]

EMILY. Oh, Mr. Royce, you certainly gave me a start!

MR. ROYCE. [*who considers himself very funny*] Caught in the act that time, dearie, caught in the act! Come on, what is it? "Advice to the Lovelorn," or "How She Kept Him Guessing"?

EMILY. [*quickly*] If Miss Doty had found me reading that, she'd —

MR. ROYCE. Yes, I know, but she's got her hands on Penrose just at present. I saw her as I came by and say, talk about "The Personal Clutch." [*He gesticulates with the book.*]

EMILY. [*reaching for it*] Look out, you're bending it!

MR. ROYCE. [*peering at it and pretending to shy*] Say! what is this anyway — some new kind of salad?

EMILY. [*with superiority*] Oh, it isn't the sort of reading you'd care about.

MR. ROYCE. And since when did we become so high and mighty about literature?

EMILY. I'm not, only you needn't think I can't guess what you've come here for. [*She rises and moves to one*

of the shelves, from which she takes down a large book.]
Some day that "Book of Etiquette" is going to show signs of wear and then you can have a little session with Miss Doty all by yourself!

MR. ROYCE. [*on the defensive*] A fellow's got to feel he's doing the thing right when he takes a girl out.

EMILY. [*bringing the book over*] Who is it this time?

MR. ROYCE. [*trying not to sound too pleased with himself*] Oh, just a little skirt whose dad owns the Wear-Well tire factory —

EMILY. [*knowingly*] And you met her at the movies.

MR. ROYCE. Well, why not? [*triumphantly*] She's asked me to a dance at her club tomorrow night, and I'm taking her to dinner first at the Merry-Go-Round.

EMILY. [*refusing to be impressed*] And you want to be sure you use the right fork for every course.

MR. ROYCE. [*a little put out*] As a matter of fact, I wanted to find out whether to wear a tuxedo or a dress-suit, and whether it's better to send her violets or sweet peas, and whether to send 'em in the afternoon or take them with me.

EMILY. Why don't you ask them up in the men's wear department?

MR. ROYCE. Do you think I want to have the life kidded out of me? Besides I've got my place to think of. Those fellows up there are awfully sore ever since I got promoted to the downstairs leather goods. They'd be tickled to death to say: "There goes Royce; he's a swell floorwalker. Don't even know what kind of a tie to wear to a dance!"

EMILY. [*quickly*] Do you suppose any girl's going to notice that, if a man can — can fascinate her with wonderful words?

MR. ROYCE. Say! How do you get that way? Any girl notices a chap's tie.

EMILY. [*sagely*] It's his words she remembers. At least, if they're worth remembering.

MR. ROYCE. Well, I notice they always listen to me.

EMILY. [*witheringly*] Who do? The girls at the notion counter?

MR. ROYCE. [*irritated and flushing*] Oh, you know what I mean.

EMILY. [*earnestly*] Of course I do, that's why I'm telling you this straight. I could kid you along the way the rest do, only, well, I'd like to see you get somewhere and show them you've got something up there under the patent leather skullcap! [*She glances up at his shiny hair.*]

MR. ROYCE. [*smoothing it and glaring at her*] What's got into you, anyway?

EMILY. I was only trying to warn you, but I see it's no use.

MR. ROYCE. [*nervously*] Warn me? About what?

EMILY. Why, about you and this latest find of yours. Remember it's a long stretch from dinner at seven to seeing her home around three o'clock in the morning. Think you're going to be able to last through?

MR. ROYCE. [*puzzled*] What are you driving at?

EMILY. I only mean that the man who can talk gets the girl. Don't you read the advertisements in the Sunday papers?

MR. ROYCE. Sure, but you don't honestly believe all that bunk about the classic bookshelf, do you?

EMILY. No, because most girls don't want to hear that kind of talk. Now if it was poetry — [*She makes an expressive gesture.*]

MR. ROYCE. [*with a short contemptuous laugh*] Poetry! Say, that's good! Me, talk poetry? Nothing doing!

EMILY. [*undaunted*] There isn't a girl living who

wouldn't rather have a book of poems dedicated to her than if a man brought her a whole florist shop.

MR. ROYCE. Say, I can't write poetry!

EMILY. [*cunningly*] I know, and I'm not asking you to. I'm only telling you most girls like it; and as long as you can't, you could at least give her a book of some one else's. You could write her name in the front and say how some of the poems reminded you of her. She couldn't help but be pleased if they were good ones.

MR. ROYCE. [*impressed in spite of himself as the truth of her words dawns upon him*] Say, you know it might work. [*He grows thoughtful.*] Specially if they was kind of sweet and -- oh, you know.

EMILY. [*opening the green book and handing it to him*] Maybe this might do. Remember, I was reading it so hard when you came in I didn't hear you.

MR. ROYCE. [*taking it with new interest*] Pretty good "ad" for it, I'll say. [*He begins to read.*]

Time goes by like endless rain;
Spring will be summer soon;
Other lovers have walked this way
Under as white a moon,
And more will follow us hand in hand
To kiss when we are through,
But none will be fair as you are fair,
Or love as I love you.

[*He breaks off.*] Say, that's not so bad! [*He turns the page and reads on with interest.*]

Your eyes are blue as pools some lost tide left.

Isn't that luck, now! She's got blue eyes, too.

EMILY. You could mark that part.

MR. ROYCE. I've got to hand it to you for the bright ideas. [*He takes out his pencil.*]

EMILY. And there's another one about walking in a park by moonlight. I think she'd like that, only [*fixing him seriously with her eyes*] I couldn't let you

mark it all up if you weren't planning to buy it. [*She waits nervously for his answer.*] It's only a dollar and a quarter.

MR. ROYCE. I'm one that'll try anything once, and you've certainly sold me on this idea. [*He pulls out some money which he gives her, taking the book and tapping it significantly with his fingers.*] Personal guarantee that the goods'll prove satisfactory, eh?

EMILY. [*smiling*] We cannot hold ourselves responsible in case of accident or bad management.

MR. ROYCE. Well, I'll risk it. Here, never mind about wrapping it up, I want to mark some more of those special places. [*He pockets it.*] Maybe I'll learn one of the short ones to spout to her. [*He turns to go.*]

EMILY. [*eagerly*] Try the one on page twenty-six.

MR. ROYCE. [*from door*] Say, if this works, I'm through saying it with flowers! This costs about half the price. So long, and I'll let you know how I make out.

EMILY. Good luck.

[*He smooths his hair, settles his tie and hurries off to his duties in the store. While EMILY is joyfully attending to this second sale, an elderly GENTLEMAN appears from the other door. He is tall and important-looking with strong features, a keen expression, and conservative, well-fitting clothes. It is plain from the girl's expression that she has never seen him before, and she is appraising him at once as a possible purchaser for the remaining book of poetry.*]

GENTLEMAN. [*with an authoritative air*] Have you a copy of Harrison's "Problems and Policies of the Business World?"

EMILY. No, I'm sorry we haven't it at present, but we could order it for you.

GENTLEMAN. That won't do me any good. I'm only

in town for a few hours. [*with some irritation*] I particularly wanted to give it away to a young man just starting in business. It's a book that should be on every merchant's desk.

EMILY. [*pleasantly*] Well, I'll speak to the head of the department when she comes back and tell her she ought to order a copy. [*as he turns to go*] There wouldn't be anything else that you could use instead?

GENTLEMAN. [*indicating the books about with a wave of his cane*] These are all pretty light — not the sort of thing that appeals to me. Yes, there's no doubt the public taste is degenerating.

EMILY. [*agreeing*] I think so, too. [*She glances down at the green book lying beneath her hand.*] The trouble is that so often people who could write splendid books just haven't got the time.

* GENTLEMAN. [*emphatically*] Nonsense, that's no excuse at all. Every one's got the same number of hours a day, haven't they?

EMILY. Why, yes, in a way — only some people have more things than there are minutes to do them in, and some people have more minutes than things, and it never seems to get evened up.

GENTLEMAN. [*sternly*] You sound like one of these street-corner orators. I suppose you'd like to see money and property all divided up equally, or some such crazy notion?

EMILY. No, just time. I'd like to see people have more of it. I mean more of it to do the things they want to in. Now, for instance, if a man, say a young man, wants to write — say, poetry and his father makes him work in a department store — well, you can see that that young man won't have very much time to write, and it just *can't* be as good poetry as if he'd had plenty of time.

GENTLEMAN. [*eyeing her shrewdly*] My dear young woman, I am not interested in manufactured instances. There's hardly a young man living that doesn't think he can write poetry just because he can make two words rhyme. Why, they don't even have to do *that* nowadays to think they're poets. Now to prove your point — [*she starts to speak but he stops her with a motion of the hand*] not that I'm asking you to, for I feel sure that a firm like Thompson Williams, and Company does not encourage its employees to argue with customers — but as I say, to prove your point you would have to show that the young man in question had talent. Undeniable talent that others recognized.

EMILY. [*eagerly, forgetful of everything but defending the author of the book*] Oh, I could do that! He had his poems published!

GENTLEMAN. [*witheringly*] Doesn't mean a thing. Scores of young men have their poems published every year. But who buys them? Tell me that — who buys them once they're all nicely printed and bound and labelled — like the one there for instance? [*He pounces upon the green one beside her on the table and scans it disapprovingly.*] "Bargains in Cathay." What a title! [*He drops the book.*] And I suppose it's full of this new-fangled stuff — no rhyme or reason to any of it. Oh, I know the kind!

EMILY. [*Going to shelf, takes down book and pretends to read from it.*]

Time goes by like endless rain;
 Spring will be summer soon;
 Other lovers have walked this way
 Under as white a moon,
 And more will follow us hand in hand
 To kiss when we are through,
 But none will be fair as you are fair,
 Or love as I love you.

[*looking up*] That's the sort of thing you like better, isn't it?

GENTLEMAN. [*approvingly*] Not so bad. No, I've read a good deal worse.

EMILY. I'm so glad, because you see — well, it's out of this one — [*tapping the green book*].

GENTLEMAN. [*irritated*] And what if it is? I'd be willing to lay a wager that whoever wrote that wasn't twenty-five years old; that he paid for half, if not all of the printing out of his own pocket; and that you won't sell one copy in a year!

EMILY. [*quickly*] Suppose I should take you up on that, and it turned out you were wrong, would you be willing to buy a copy of the book yourself?

GENTLEMAN. [*taken aback*] Well, really, this is about the most — [*He breaks off and studies her shrewdly.*] How long have you been with Thompson Williams, and Company, may I ask?

EMILY. Nearly a year.

GENTLEMAN. [*with some heat*] And do you mean to tell me that in a year you haven't learned that it isn't the place of employees to lay bets with customers — especially customers of — of the opposite sex?

EMILY. [*apologetically*] Well, but you suggested it. I never would have thought of it myself.

GENTLEMAN. [*with dignity*] I'm sure no one could call me narrow-minded or undemocratic, but I do draw the line at some things!

EMILY. [*thoughtfully*] It's too bad, because now you'll never know whether you're right or not.

GENTLEMAN. I know I'm right!

EMILY. [*persistently*] Then I don't see why you'd mind, if you're so sure you wouldn't lose anything by it?

GENTLEMAN. It's past belief. [*He takes out his handkerchief and nervously mops his face.*] Never in all my

experience! [*He breaks off and turns to EMILY again.*] Well, and suppose I should do as you say, what about *my* points? Can you deny that the author of that ridiculous book is over twenty-five?

EMILY. [*calmly*] I don't deny it. He's twenty-three.

GENTLEMAN. [*with satisfaction*] And that he paid for publishing that stuff himself?

EMILY. He paid for half of it, yes.

GENTLEMAN. [*turning on her*] And as to selling it in a year — you may not be in any position to know by that time!

EMILY. [*scared but keeping up her spirit*] Well, I just wanted to tell you that you've lost on that last part. [*She holds the book out challengingly to him.*] "Bargains in Cathay" just came in this morning. It isn't an hour since I put them out on this table. There were three of them then, and now [*she cannot resist a scared but triumphant smile*], well, you can see for yourself they're all sold! [*She puts it in his hand.*] It's a dollar and a quarter, so you see it's a real bargain.

GENTLEMAN. [*staring at her dumbfounded*] Well, I'll be damned!

[*At this moment Miss DOTY appears. She takes one look at the customer, gives a little gasp and, sweeping EMILY to one side, places herself before him all smiles and apologies.*]

MISS DOTY. Oh, Mr. Williams! [*EMILY, at the name, drops her cashbook and pencil and makes a queer sound in her throat.*] I'm so sorry I wasn't here when you came, but I was called away for a few minutes on very important business. I do hope you've had your wants attended to. [*Signalling EMILY to pick up her pencil and retire.*] My assistant hasn't been with us very long, and she doesn't always understand customer's needs, but I —

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. [*interrupting dryly*] Oh, I've been attended to!

MISS DOTY. [*hastily*] I'm afraid she isn't an ideal saleswoman. I've been feeling for some time —

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. [*interrupting her emphatically*] No, she's in a class by herself. She ought to be running my entire business! And I'd like to have a few words alone with her.

MISS DOTY. [*put out*] Why, of course, Mr. Williams.

[*He waves MISS DOTY away. She goes out, plainly disgruntled. EMILY does not move or look up.*]

MR. WILLIAMS, SR., turns to her with an admiring twinkle in his eye.]

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. Well, my dear young woman, I suppose you know what you've done?

EMILY. [*crestfallen*] Yes, I guess I've made a pretty bad mess of things.

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. Look here, I want to get this thing straight. You say you've sold three copies since 9:30 this morning?

EMILY. Yes, Mr. Williams, you see Miss Doty said nobody'd buy them, but I thought I'd just try.

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. [*to himself*] And they say the Age of Miracles is past! [*to her*] What's your name?

EMILY. Emily Gray.

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. Well, Miss Emily Gray, how would you like to take charge of the New York store's book department?

EMILY. [*dazed*] Me — you mean —?

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. I mean that a girl who can sell three copies of a book like that—

EMILY. [*earnestly*] I wish you wouldn't talk about the book that way, Mr. Williams. You see it's by — well, Thompson wrote it and —

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. [*with no sign of surprise*] Of

course he wrote it. I ran into his publisher only last week, and he told me they were bringing it out.

EMILY. Then you — you knew all the time.

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. That's where the miracle comes in. I knew and you made me buy it just the same! I came down here to put an end to this sort of nonsense and look at what happened! [*He picks up the book again and opens it.*]

[THOMPSON WILLIAMS appears at the door, and hurries in.]

MR. WILLIAMS, JR. Hello, Dad, Jerry said you — [*He stops short in amazement.*] Great Guns! You're reading my book!

EMILY. He's bought it, Tommie!

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. She made me! She could make anybody buy anything. That's why I'm asking her to take charge of the New York bookshop. [*to EMILY*] Think you can be ready to come down next week?

EMILY. [*looking at WILLIAMS, JR.*] Why you see, I — I made some rather important plans first, and —

MR. WILLIAMS, JR. [*putting his arm around her*] I guess it's the only business deal I ever got ahead of you in, Dad, but the fact is — there's going to be a new firm of Thompson Williams and Company. *She's* the "and Company!"

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. You don't mean to tell me this is the girl you've been writing me about! The one you think you're in l—

MR. WILLIAMS, JR. The very same.

EMILY. [*breaking in*] And maybe you don't remember, but you said once that if he could prove to you that just one sane person of his own free will would buy a book of his poems you'd —

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. I know — said I'd give him a try at it, so I suppose I've got to keep my word, though

God knows no man's sanity is safe when a girl like that gets hold of him, and as for "Free Will—" [*He gestures expressively with his hands.*]

MR. WILLIAMS, JR. [*going to him with outstretched hands*] Dad, you're just —

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. [*waving him away*] All right, all right, but get back to the third floor again. I can't have you leaving in the middle of the morning, and with a bargain sale on, too. [*He looks at his watch and prepares to go.*] You and Miss Gray meet me for lunch at one o'clock. We can talk things over then. [*He walks away, but EMILY runs after him, holding out the book which he has left on the table.*]

EMILY. Please, Mr. Williams, you were forgetting your book. [*smiling up at him, but managing to preserve her most businesslike manner*] And shall I charge it or will you pay?

MR. WILLIAMS, SR. [*with another chuckle*] Well, I'll be damned! [*beginning to feel in his pocket*] Oh, I'll pay!

CURTAIN

MONEY ¹

By Michael Gold

CHARACTERS

MOISHA, *a cobbler*

YONKEL, *a peddler*

ABRAM, *a porter*

HYMAN, *a peddler*

MENDEL, *a factory worker*

POLICEMAN

SCENE. *A gloomy East Side cellar, a cobbler's shop by day, now in the deep of night, the sleeping place of five weary men. In the darkness their forms are seen vaguely, like queer distorted sacks flung on these old mattresses. No sheets cover them, and they are dressed in undershirts and pants. Some wear socks, others are barefooted. Three or four wooden steps, seen through a glass window, lead up to the East Side street of tenements and night. A faint shaft of light from an arc lamp breaks through the glass window of the door and illuminates the cellar with a goblin glow.*

Four of the men are sleeping; one of them snores. But the fifth, REB MOISHA, the cobbler himself, is sitting up on his mattress and uttering mournful sighs. He is a thin, pale man, with a reddish beard, feverish eyes, and shoulders hunched by long years at the bench.

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MOISHA. [*in a low voice, so as not to disturb the others*] Gottenu, Gottenu, Gottenu!¹ [*He sighs again, then slowly lifting himself, and stepping softly as a thief, he lights a candle and looks about the shop, sighing all the while. One of the sleepers stirs restlessly, and MOISHA stands stock still. A moment later he is searching again.*] Where is it? Where can it be? [*He feels about the walls, under and above his cobbler's last, everywhere. He wrings his hands.*] Is it really gone? Gottenu, gone?

[*The restless SLEEPER stirs again, and then sits up and looks at MOISHA. He is a very thin little Jew, a shoelace peddler, with anemic body and a black wiry beard that stands out sharply on his pallid face.*]

YONKEL. Again you wake me, Moisha. I am a weak man; I must sleep; the doctor of the big hospital said I need rest.

MOISHA. I know — forgive me, Yonkel. You know what I am looking for.

YONKEL. But why should you wake me? Is it right? And for a whole week it has been — for a whole week. Every night I must lie here and listen to you looking — looking — looking.

MOISHA. [*humbly*] It comes on me, Yonkel. All day I work and put it out of my head. I say, "Well, it is past, the money is gone, now I will begin another struggle." But in the night, when there are no shoes to be mended, when I am alone, then it comes. I must look. I cannot help it.

YONKEL. But the money is gone, Moisha. You are looking for a shadow. You lost it somewhere, in the street, or somewhere. Be a man. Go to sleep, and stop worrying.

¹ Gottenoo'. A Yiddish diminutive for *God*. There is no English equivalent.

MOISHA. [*eagerly*] No, it is here. It *must* be here. How *could* it be any other place? See how I came to lose it, Yonkel, and tell me whether the money could have been lost any place else but in this cellar. Listen. This is how it was: It was seven o'clock that night, and I sat here alone counting the money, one hundred dollars in bills, five-dollar and ten-dollar bills, twelve dollars in silver, one hundred and twelve dollars in all. As I was counting, I heard a customer coming down the steps, so I quickly tied up the money in my handkerchief and put it —

YONKEL. [*impatiently*] I have heard all this before, Moisha. What do you want of my life? Sleep, in God's name, sleep! [*He lies down himself.*]

MOISHA. [*mournfully, sitting down on his mattress*] Yes, I will do as you say. I will try to sleep, Yonkel. I will shut my eyes and maybe peace will come. [*Shuts his eyes for a moment.*] But it is no use, Yonkel!

YONKEL. Ai, let me alone.

MOISHA. [*mumbling, then rising to wail*] No use. One cannot shut out the world and its troubles by shutting one's eyes. It is here, Yonkel, in my blood, in my brain, in my heart. It is a disease only death can cure. Yes, O God, let me die. Be kind. When a cat or dog is very sick, men kill it. Be as kind, O God. My heart is broken, and you let me live on and suffer. Why is this, O God? Why —

ABRAM. [*A stout, outright sort of Jew, a carpenter with sparse, black beard and big voice, wearing a red flannel undershirt. He turns on his mattress and looks at MOISHA sleepily.*] Why is what, Moisha? Did you speak to me?

YONKEL. Ai, he is looking for his money again, Abram!

ABRAM. Can't you sleep, Moisha?

MOISHA. How can I? You understand.

YONKEL. [*sharply*] How can we? We have our troubles, many as great as yours. No man is happy. See, I have been sleeping, and I know that in a few years I may die. The doctor said so, but what can I do?

MOISHA. The money *must* be here somewhere. Any one can see that.

YONKEL. [*in a loud voice*] Moisha, I swear it, I swear it on my mother's grave, that if you keep me awake another night, I will take my mattress and move. I pay you a dollar a month rent, and I have my rights. I will stand no more.

ABRAM. [*putting up his hand*] Shah, Yonkala, shah, not so loud. You seem to take Moisha's wandering at night more bitterly than all of us. It is not necessary.

YONKEL. I am sorry for him, Abram, but he must not be a fool. And I am a sick man, God knows, and I must have fresh air and good food and rest, the doctor said.

ABRAM. All right, just let him alone and he will go to bed. Won't you, Moisha?

MOISHA. [*taking up candle and looking at them pitifully*] Just once more I will look for the money and then I will not bother you again. Just once. It must be here. Money is not like water, to run away into the cracks or be dried up into the air. It *must* be here. Gottenu, it must be — [*His voice goes off into a pitiful mumbling, as he taps and feels about the cellar in its corners with the candle in his hand.*]

ABRAM. [*calling after him*] Moisha, what is the use, there is nothing to do. The money is gone, so take up your burden again and be brave. This will not help.

MOISHA. [*mumbling*] Yes, Abram. Yes, Abram. [*But he continues looking.*]

ABRAM. [*whispering to the peddler YONKEL*] Did you see the look in his eyes? Like a fire, Yonkel, that burns him up. He will go crazy.

YONKEL. No, he will get over it, with God's help.

ABRAM. I am afraid for our poor Moisha, Yonkel. I fear for him.

YONKEL. Men have lost money before.

ABRAM. Yes, but it is a terrible thing to work a whole year for the devil. And see what the money meant to Moisha. We would weep, too, if we had lost it.

YONKEL. Yes, it meant everything to him.

ABRAM. We all know you love money, Yonkel, but not for the same reasons as Moisha. You would not need to suffer so much if you had lost — how much was it he lost, Yonkel?

YONKEL. [*indifferently*] About one hundred and twelve dollars, he said.

ABRAM. [*musings*] One hundred and twelve dollars! To Rothschild it would mean nothing. And for Moisha it means life and death. Everything is so different for the rich and the poor. I think God made two worlds for us to live in. [*The CARPENTER sighs in his beard.*]

YONKEL. Better call him again, Abram.

ABRAM. Yes, we must get him to bed. Moisha!

MOISHA. [*looking up*] Just a minute. I will look in this other corner, and then come.

ABRAM. Ai, let him look. Let him hope. It is better than nothing.

YONKEL. But hope won't find his money. And there isn't a hole or corner or spider's web of this old cellar he hasn't searched.

ABRAM. If we could only help him! If we only knew where the money is! How do you think it was lost, Yonkel?

YONKEL. How should I know? Am I a fortune teller?

ABRAM. Well, what do you think anyway?

YONKEL. [*indifferently*] I don't know. He lost it in the street maybe; or maybe it was stolen from him. Who can tell?

ABRAM. [*musingly*] Stolen? How do you know? I never thought of that. Yes, it might have been stolen. But how? Who would have done such a thing?

YONKEL. [*annoyed*] Why do you ask me? I didn't say I knew it was stolen. I only said I *thought* so. It is —

[*They hear a loud crash. MOISHA has stood up suddenly and has thrown over two empty packing cases in the back of the room. He is coming toward them excitedly, the candle fluttering. The two other sleeping Jews have been roused by the sound and are looking around them dazedly.*]

MENDEL. [*one of the two, a young, sickly man with a slight moustache; a sweatshop worker*] What was that?

ABRAM. [*to MOISHA, who stands over him*] Have you found it, Moisha?

MOISHA. No, no, but I heard what Yonkel just said! Is it true, Yonkel?

HYMAN. [*the other of the two sleepers, a white-haired old man, with a feeble, high voice*] God in heaven, the money again? You are like an owl, Moisha, crying as soon as it is dark.

MOISHA. [*almost hysterical with excitement*] Yes, but listen, Hyman, Yonkel has just told me something new. He says the money was stolen. Perhaps we will find it now. Oh, who stole my money, Yonkel, who was it stole my money?

MENDEL. [*in a despairing wail*] God in heaven, no sleep again.

YONKEL. [*fiercely, like a trapped beast*] What is the matter with you two? Are you both crazy? Or are you trying to drive me crazy? I drop a word and you make a mountain of it. Have I said I knew the money was stolen, Abram? I said it might have been stolen. That was all. Now let me alone.

MOISHA. But it is true, it is plain, it is clear. Yonkel just said —

ABRAM. [*soothing him*] No, he only said he *thought* the money was stolen. That is true, Moisha.

HYMAN. Why did you put such a thought in his head, Yonkel?

MOISHA. [*obsessed now by the idea*] Abram, it is plain as day to me now. Why have I not seen it before? Have my brains been stolen, too? It does not matter what Yonkel said, but I know now the money was not lost. It was stolen.

ABRAM. Ai, now you have a new worry. Forget this idea.

MOISHA. [*very eager, his hands waving*] Listen, Abram. I see how it all happened. I was sitting that night, all alone here by the candlelight, counting my money, one hundred and twelve dollars; in bills, one hundred dollars; in silver twelve dollars. It was about seven o'clock, and none of you were yet home. Then as I am counting —

HYMAN. You have told us this many times, Moisha.

MOISHA. [*almost screaming in his excitement*] Listen! Listen! Now it is clear! I am counting the money, and as I am counting I hear a step on the stair. I put the money quickly away, here in a hole in the mattress where I always kept it. The door opens and a customer enters. It is a boy with a pair of shoes to be heeled, and he sits down, takes them off, and waits, while I work on them. As I work Mendel comes in, then Hyman and

ABRAM. You eat your suppers. Hyman had herring and bread, I remember, and Mendel corned beef sandwiches. I finish the shoes and the boy leaves. Then we sit and talk a little, Yonkel and I. Abram and Mendel play cards, Hyman reads a newspaper. Then I blow out the candle and we go to bed. I remember it all like yesterday. In the morning, at about six, I awake. Abram has already gone to work, as always. The others are still sleeping. I go to open the door to let in the fresh morning air. I come back and look in the mattress for my money. I do not find it. It is gone. It has vanished like a cloud. Now, how could I have lost it? It must have been stolen; there was no other way! Abram, am I right?

ABRAM. [*slowly*] You know what you are saying, Moisha?

MOISHA. Yes.

ABRAM. You mean, then, Moisha, that one of us stole it?

MOISHA. [*perplexed and tearful*] What else can I believe? There was no one else in the cellar all that night. Tell me, is there anything else to believe?

[*The other men look at each other blankly.*]

HYMAN. You see what you have done, Yonkel.

ABRAM. Can there really be a thief among us?

MENDEL. But didn't you go out for rolls, Moisha? You might have taken your money with you then.

MOISHA. I hadn't gone for the rolls yet. No.

HYMAN. [*earnestly*] No one here would have taken your money, Moisha.

ABRAM. Yes, it is impossible. You didn't think of it till now; don't believe it any more.

MOISHA. [*throwing out his hands*] But where is my money?

HYMAN. It *must* have been lost, Moisha.

MOISHA. Where could I have lost it? I went nowhere.

ABRAM. [*solemnly*] Moisha, we are all of us poor men. And we are weak men, and bad men, bad as the rest. For a little money we have to work and pay with our blood and sweat. It would be easy to tempt us. But, look at us, Moisha. Can you really believe one of us would have robbed you of what meant so much to you?

MOISHA. [*weeping*] No, I do not believe it. I did not even dream of it before, until Yonkel spoke of it. But was there any other way the money could have disappeared that night, unless someone stole it? Tell me, Abram.

ABRAM. [*depressed, a frown on his bluff face*] I don't know what to think, Moisha.

HYMAN. [*shrilly*] I can't believe it! It would have been like stealing a man's child, to steal that money from you.

MOISHA. [*wailing mournfully, in the orthodox Hebrew singsong*] Yes, it was my child, you all knew that. It was the wife and children in Poland I have not seen for five years. I have starved and struggled to save enough to send for them, and now the money is gone. Oh, you are Jews, you have suffered and been lonely, in this strange land! Who of you could have done this?

ABRAM. [*staunchly*] I swear it, Moisha, no one —

MOISHA. [*throwing his arms about him and weeping*] Good, kind, beloved Abram, who has always been true as gold to me, was not the door locked all that night? Were not only we five here? What have they done to me? Why have they taken my life, my hope away?

MENDEL. [*eagerly*] He can search us, Abram. I know I have not touched his money.

ABRAM. [*sadly*] Do you want to do that, Moisha?

MOISHA. Oh, what will it help? It is a week now the money is gone, and searching will not find it. No, give it back to me. Have pity, pity, pity! [*weeps with face in hands.*]

ABRAM. [*in despair*] I don't know what to do. What can we do for him, Hyman?

HYMAN. [*timidly*] Moisha —

MOISHA. [*looking at them wildly, his voice high and despairing*] No, I will not search you! No, I will ask you each, in the name of the God of Israel, in the name of your own brothers and sisters, your own wives and children in Poland, did you take it? I weep before you, I throw my tired old body on the ground before you, I ask you again and again: Did you take my money? What does a man live for, I ask you? Does he live only to work, to make shoes in a dark hole away from the sun? No, he lives for his children, to see them grow up strong and happy, and to reach greater things than he himself has reached. That is what a man lives for. But you have taken my children away from me. Oh, who has taken my life away from me? Did you take it, Hyman? Hyman, dear, I beg you, have you taken my children from me? Tell me, I will forgive you if you did. Did you?

HYMAN. [*sorrowfully*] How can you ask that, Moisha? Strip me to the skin; search everything I have.

MOISHA. What can I believe, Hyman? Was it you, Mendel? Did you do it? Have you my money? Give it back; only give it back; I will not reproach you; I shall be glad to forget. Mendel, did you?

MENDEL. What are you saying to me, Moisha?

MOISHA. Did you?

MENDEL. [*passionately*] No, no. How could I?

MOISHA. Abram, did you? I must know, I must find

my money. Would you have done such a thing to me, Abram? Or you, Yonkel? Tell me, in God's name. Tell me.

ABRAM. [*slowly*] Moisha, I sooner would have cut off my right hand. You know that.

YONKEL. [*lifting his face from his hands*] I did not take it, Moisha.

MOISHA. You have never known wife or children, Yonkel. But you saw your brother killed by the Cossacks, and you know what it is to lose loved ones. Don't you know where my money is, Yonkel?

YONKEL. [*tears running down his pale face, his voice broken*] Why do you ask me again? I have told you I don't know.

MOISHA. [*desperate and wild*] So what can I do? Where can I turn now? You say none of you took my money. But it was stolen from me, I know that.

HYMAN. Before you were sure you forgot or lost the money somewhere; now you are sure it was stolen. Don't you see how mad this all is, Moisha?

MOISHA. [*his mood growing to an hysterical anger*] It is not mad. Don't you try to put me off, Hyman. One of you *must* have it. Or all of you took it and are keeping it from me. That is the way you stole it; you did it together. You must give it up now, do you hear?

ABRAM. [*to YONKEL*] Now he is really mad. I told you it would drive him mad.

YONKEL. [*his face in his hands*] Oh, don't speak to me, Abram.

MOISHA. [*pacing the floor, while the others watch him in awe*] Yes, you have all been plotting against me. I can see that now! It is clear. But you will not succeed, do you hear? I will not be killed so easily. I will fight. I will make you give it up. I will —

ABRAM. [*trying to restrain him*] Moisha!

MOISHA. [*screaming as he breaks away from ABRAM's hand*] Let me be! I know what I am doing. And I know how to make you give it up! I will lock the door on all of you, and go for a policeman. That is what I will do. He will make you tell the truth, he will make you give up my money! You will listen to his club, you hard-hearted men who wouldn't listen to my tears. And how I trusted you all, how I believed you were my friends! Now you have stabbed me in the heart; you have taken what is only a little money to you, but to me is life! Murderers, give me back my money! For the last time, give me back what I have suffered for, give me back my wife and children!

ABRAM. [*going to door and standing by him*] Don't shout, Moisha. Moisha, be reasonable, listen to us!

MOISHA. No, I have listened long enough! I have asked for the truth from thieves long enough. I am going to call a policeman now. I will show you. I will make you all confess. I — [*he starts to go out.*]

ABRAM. [*holding him*] Moisha, for God's sake, what would you do?

MOISHA. [*struggling*] Ah, is it you, Abram? You whom I trusted most of all?

ABRAM. What do you mean?

MOISHA. [*in mad, exulting voice*] See, he trembles already! He is afraid of the policeman; it was he that took the money! Now we know — now we know — Abram — [*He turns white and half faints into ABRAM's arms.*] Ah, my heart! [*ABRAM takes him to the cobbler's bench and seats him there.*]

ABRAM. Bring some water, Mendel! Quick! [*They press the water on MOISHA. He sips it, and opens his eyes slowly.*] Quiet, Moisha, quiet!

MOISHA. [*sobbing in a low, heartrending voice*] I cannot do it over again, I tell you! You see how my

heart has failed me. I have not the strength to starve, to wait another five years in this cellar. No.

HYMAN. Moisha —

MOISHA. Yes, it is all over for me. Ai, ai! it is over — my sun and moon have gone out. I wish I could die.

ABRAM. Shah, Moisha dear! [*He takes MOISHA's hand. There is a little space of quiet. Then MOISHA looks up with big, staring eyes.*]

MOISHA. [*tensely*] Listen. I have solved it all. I do not need the money. Some night when I am alone I will take my cobbler's knife and cut my throat. That will be best.

ABRAM. What are you saying? Moisha, do not —

MOISHA. [*in fresh burst of tears*] But what else can I do? Am I not dead now? I have no strength, no hope, to begin again. It is over for me. I will cut my throat. I will kill myself. I will not wait for God to be kind. I will end it all.

HYMAN. Moisha, dear!

[*MOISHA becomes weak again. They give him more water. He shuts his eyes and gasps, while the tears flow down his cheeks.*]

MOISHA. [*weakly and pitifully*] Dear, kind, good friends, Jews who know what it is to be a Jew and suffer, why have you done this to me? Why have you killed me? Have I ever injured one of you? Have I ever taken from you one thing that was yours? Have I not lain here with you night after night, and been one of you? I am no stranger. And you saw —

YONKEL. [*Suddenly springing up from the mattress where he has been moodily sitting all through this. He looks wildly at Abram and clutches at his shirt.*] My God, Moisha! [*The rest look at him, startled. His long pale face is white as a madman's. His eyes burn with fever.*]

HYMAN. What is wrong, Yonkel?

YONKEL. I can't stand this, I can't stand this!
[*He sits down on his mattress again.*]

MOISHA. Yes, what shall I do, Yonkel? You see how terrible life has become for me. It is hopeless. Yonkel, you remember when you were sick, and lay a month here night and day. I charged you no rent, and tended you, and now see what has become of me. What shall I do? Shall I —

YONKEL. [*springing up*] Stop! Stop, Moisha! Here is your money! [*He pulls out a small canvas bag from where it was tied by a string around his neck, next to the skin. As he hands the bag to MOISHA, he is seized by a violent fit of coughing. MOISHA seizes the money eagerly, uttering gurgling sounds of joy, and counts the contents of the bag. Meanwhile ABRAM comes over to the coughing YONKEL and hits him a hard blow on the jaw. YONKEL falls, coughing in an uncontrollable spasm that shakes his whole frame.*]

ABRAM. [*in a roar of disgust*]. You louse!

MENDEL. [*shaking his head*] And this is God's world!

HYMAN. [*mildly, as he strokes his white beard*] Better leave him alone now, Abram. His coughing is on him again.

ABRAM. [*fiercely, as he pushes YONKEL's body aside with his foot*] The thief! The louse! It is no Jew, no man here, it is a mean little blood-sucking louse!

HYMAN. [*patiently*] He is very sick. We had better put him on the mattress.

ABRAM. I won't help a louse! I would rather kill it!

HYMAN. Here, Mendel, help me. [*They lift YONKEL, who is still coughing, on to his mattress. They give him MOISHA's water.*]

MOISHA. [*coming over to ABRAM*] The money is all here, thank God! One hundred and twelve dollars, all here!

ABRAM. [*forgetting his black rage*] And now you are happy again, yes, Moisha?

MOISHA. [*sadly*] No, when was I happy before? And I will not see them yet — my family. I need sixty dollars more, and it will take many months to save it. But I will eat less, I will work more, I will save, save, save!

ABRAM. Shah, Moisha, you will strain your heart again. Lie down on the mattress and rest!

MOISHA. Yes, yes, I must rest. [ABRAM *helps him to lie down.*] Abram, you will forgive what I said to you before? I did not mean it; I was half crazy.

ABRAM. I understand, Moisha.

MOISHA. It has all been like a bad dream to me.

[YONKEL *begins coughing again.*]

ABRAM. Yes, a bad dream, but not yet ended for some. A policeman will be here yet, and we will see what a louse gets for stealing.

HYMAN. [*slowly*] I think, Abram, we should let him alone now! He is very sick.

YONKEL. [*sitting up and coughing*] No, he is right; Abram is right, Hyman.

ABRAM. I am right, am I?

YONKEL. [*weeping*] Yes, Abram. I deserve everything.

ABRAM. [*standing over him*] So why did you do it? You know it was wrong now, so how could you have done it? You knew why Moisha was saving, was starving himself to a shadow.

YONKEL. [*coughing*] I — I — saw how —

ABRAM. [*fiercely*] Don't explain. I will tell you why you did it. I have met your kind before. It is because you are one of those Jews who have a lust for money. It is the food of your soul, like blood is the food of the louse. Don't tell me, I know. Suck-suck-suck, suck

till you've sucked all your brothers dry. What a man! Hah! [*He spits in disgust.*]

YONKEL. [*weakly*] Yes, Abram.

ABRAM. [*fiercely*] Yes, Yonkel! "Yes," you whine, "it is true, Abram!" You admit you are one of those whose religion is to steal and lie and kill and betray — all for money!

HYMAN. [*intervening*] There are many like that in the world, Abram. They are very wealthy.

ABRAM. But I am not like that. I have always worked, you know that, Hyman. I have always paid my full price of blood and sweat for my bread. I have been honest. I have tried to hurt no man.

HYMAN. [*with the mild dry humor of an old man*] That is why you are poor.

ABRAM. There are many other poor and honest men. There are many.

HYMAN. Yes, there are too many of us, Abram.

ABRAM. What do you mean? You speak in riddles. What I know is: Let the world be good or bad, a man should be a man. That is what I believe. One ought not make others suffer — as Yonkel made you suffer, Moisha.

YONKEL. I suffered, too. [*He has another spell of coughing.*]

ABRAM. [*with contempt*] You suffered!

YONKEL. Yes.

ABRAM. Bah! You *will* suffer. You have still to know what Moisha here felt. I am going to have you arrested.

MOISHA. [*slowly opening his eyes*] No. I think it isn't necessary, Abram.

ABRAM. What? Is there to be no honesty in the world? I say thieves must be punished!

YONKEL. [*eagerly*] I suffered, yes, I did. You don't believe it, Abram! Let me —

ABRAM. [*with fierce contempt*] But I won't listen to you, I tell you! I will hear you in the court. I will hear you tell the judge how you suffered.

MOISHA. [*slowly*] Let him be. He should not have stolen my money. But I have it back.

ABRAM. What do you think, Hyman? Do you think we ought to let such a thief go?

HYMAN. It is hard to tell, Abram. You are so sure, but I am not. What can one do in this world where there is more evil than good? Let him go, maybe.

MENDEL. I heard a speaker on the street say once that the rich are all thieves. But no one punishes them.

ABRAM. [*pounding one fist into the other*] Do not try to confuse me. The thing is simple — it happened in this cellar. I have eyes, I have ears, I have seen and heard how this happened. Yonkel stole the money. It was like sucking the heart's blood from Moisha. It was unnecessary, too. Yonkel was not starving. He took it because of his black lust for money. He is a louse. As soon as he stops coughing, I will take him to the station house! [*He gets up and stamps about fiercely.*]

YONKEL. [*breaking down into sobs*] Don't have me arrested, Abram! Don't have me put into one of those cold, dark prisons where I would die soon. There is no one with a kind heart in a prison — I would go mad there. Don't let him do it, Moisha dear! I am a Jew, we are all Jews together. I came from the same town in Poland you did, Moisha. . . .

ABRAM. You didn't remember you were Moisha's kinsman before!

YONKEL. I didn't want to take your money, Moisha, no, no, I didn't. I cried as I took it from the hole in your mattress that night. I knew what it meant to you, and how you worked for it. Believe me, Moisha, I cried for you, Moisha!

ABRAM. You make my head go round. You cried, and yet you took it.

HYMAN. Let us hear him out, Abram. Let him tell why he did it.

ABRAM. But I don't understand. Why should he do it if he cried?

HYMAN. Let him explain. People are like that, Abram. You are made of one piece, like a big tree. You don't understand how people can be both good and bad. Let him explain.

YONKEL. Yes, that's how it is, Hyman. Don't let him have me arrested. Let him arrest the thing in me that got up in the night and went to the money. Oh, how it seized on the money, so glad and hot, while I stood by and wept for you, Moisha! And Moisha, when I saw you suffering all this week, I could bear it the least of all of us. . . . I lay here listening to you — I groaned with you — I tore my flesh — but what could I do? [*another fit of coughing*] One night, and then another, I got up — I — and tried to give the money back to you somehow. I stood over you in the darkness, and my tears fell on your white face, and I could have kissed you for pity. I heard you groan, and I knew what was making your whole body shake, and burning it like a fever. It was terrible. I took out the money and started to place it where it belonged, but I could not. I could do nothing. It was like watching a friend drown, and having a life preserver in one's hand, and being unable to throw it. What could I do? Does a man always conquer the beast he meets in a forest? And can a man always conquer the beasts inside himself? What could I do? [*He coughs, and HYMAN hands him the water.*]

HYMAN. Drink, Yonkel.

YONKEL. Thanks. Yes, so it happened for three

nights. You will not believe it, but I could not return the money. And I would go back to my mattress and lie there, and shiver all night with fear. I was afraid — afraid of Money! What was it — this Beast that God had put into the world? It was in many men, eating and eating their happiness, making them cruel to each other. I was afraid of it. I would feel it move around the room, filling the corners and coming toward me, to spring at my throat. I would be afraid to open my eyes, for fear I would see it standing above me with its hot breath. I was afraid I might see its yellow eyes, that change to green, and look upon men. Do you understand, Moisha? Do you understand, Abram?

ABRAM. [*slowly*] I don't know. But talk on, Yonkel. You were always a good talker.

MOISHA. In the old country, I remember, you did not care for money, Yonkel. But here you seem to have become a miser. It is the old Yonkel that is talking now.

YONKEL. No, in Poland I did not care for money — Moisha remembers that. I was a poor young Talmud student there, but happy. I lived on a radish a day, I slept on the hard benches of the synagogue, I cared for nothing but to live with my soul and to study the sacred books. In the quiet of the room where I sat, I would hear angels' wings moving like music. A joy was in me, for I was alone in a place where there was only God. The world never touched me. Poland is a terrible land for the Jews, but they helped each other, they were friends. I never starved, I was taken care of, they understood my passion. And I would not have cared if I starved — I lived above Life and Death then. It is hard for me to believe it now. I am different now. See how thin and unhappy I am now. But I have money. I have learned to care for money. How did it

happen? I remember how it began. I remember when I came here, how friendless I was. It was all different here from Poland. What good did my Talmud study do me, what good was it that I heard angels' wings? I went into a shop where they paid me a few dollars a week. I bent over a machine and fed it my strength and my thoughts, my blood and my desires. And it turned out pants. And it turned out cloaks. I slaved and I slaved — and nothing came of it. There were slack times, and strikes, and days when I was sick. I went to work in a grocery store after that. And I slaved and was sick there, too. Nothing came of it all. I was always poor. And no one cared for me when I had no money. The boss laid us off, or let us walk out on strike, and no one cared. I was sick, and no one cared if I died or lived. I had no money! Something said to me, something in this land — get money! It is not enough to study the Talmud, to work, to be a man. You must have money! And a great fear seized on me, the Beast entered me, and I suddenly grew afraid of being poor! I gave up God, for the Beast was jealous. And I tried to make money, for it is stronger than God. With it I could despise and stand above the world, as I stood above it without money in Poland, with only my soul. Yes, I felt the fear! Men are shot down for want of money. Men are crucified for want of money. Men who have no money live in cellars like this, and are lonely for their children. Don't you awake in the night, sweating cold, Abram, and wonder how long your job will last, what your old age will be like, who would care for your children if you should die? Thoughts such as these? Doesn't the fear of poverty ever come on you, Moisha, and you, Hyman, and you, Abram?

HYMAN. Yes, it does.

MENDEL. Yes.

MOISHA. Yes, often.

ABRAM. Yes, and on me, too. . . . I understand what you are saying, Yonkel. It is true. Money is a terrible thing. But may I ask you something?

YONKEL. Yes.

ABRAM. I can understand how a poor man would get to fear poverty so much he would do anything to escape it. I have felt that myself. But I have beat it down, because I have felt — well, if there are so many poor in the world, I can be poor with them, too. But I can understand your feelings, too, Yonkel. What I cannot understand is this — how could you have stolen money from Moisha? If you took it from a rich man or a worthless man, or if you cheated some one, as these millionaires do, it might not have been so bad. But to take it from Moisha!

YONKEL. I know, I know, Abram. Don't you see that is what has made me suffer? I knew what a terrible thing it was to take Moisha's money from him. I knew it more than all of you. I never knew it more than at that moment in the night when I took it. It was like a madness on me, but I could not stop it. And yet in that moment, I was sanest, too. Like a flash of lightning I saw myself for the first time in many years, and I saw what the desire for money had made of the old Yonkel. I started by thinking I would make money my slave, and I saw in that moment I had become its slave. There is a story in one of the old Hebrew books that explains. It is about a little village to which there came every night a great, terrible snake and ate one of the children. This went on for many years, and the people prayed to God but got no help. Then a very learned rabbi there, taking pity on the people said, "Since God does not help us, we will use other ways." And he went out into the forest to fight the snake, and

he stayed there seven years, battling the snake, night and day. He used every means, but they seemed to fail. At last he thought, "There is only one way left." So he chose that way, and changed himself into a snake, too, with flat head and poison dripping from his mouth. And for another year he fought the snake that had eaten the children, and finally he conquered it. But when he returned to the village to tell them of his victory, the people fled before him. And he wept when he remembered that he was no longer a man, but was a snake, whose delight is to poison and to kill all that it sees. Do you understand? . . . And now I will ask you something, Abram.

ABRAM. Yes, Yonkel.

YONKEL. You were angry before, and called me a louse. I do not blame you. [*with a fierce cry of passion*] But I ask you, Abram, who made the louse? Who put it into the world to live on the blood of men? Who gave it that appetite and body?

ABRAM. It must have been God.

YONKEL. Then who but God is to blame for its ways? Is the louse to blame? . . . No. And then am I to blame, for what I have become? Is not the thing that made me so to blame? Is not Money to blame, Money the real God of the world? Oh, my fellow Jews, you who are so meek and suffering, you who understand, I tell you I am my own worst enemy. Money has made me so. I am sick, but I live in this cellar, because I wish more money. I want a quiet mind, with the thoughts that move through all the universe and are free and joyful. But I have let this mind be killed by the one hungry thought — the thought of money. I loved Moisha — here, I pitied him and wished him good fortune and a way out of his misery. But you saw what I did to him — for a little money. Oh, I am sick, I am

sick with the disease of money! If I could find where it is in my breast, if I could find this cancer in my soul, I would take a terrible knife and stab it out! But would that cure it? No, for the whole world is sick with it, the whole world is its own worst enemy! I could sell or give away the little goods I peddle, I could throw my money in the river, and tomorrow I would feel free. But the next day I would be seeing men strain and sweat and hurt each other for money. And the fever would come on me again, too, and I would say: It is necessary to have money to live. It is necessary to have much money to stand above the world. And it is true — it is necessary! But it is also necessary to be a man, and to think thoughts that fly to God and are beautiful. It is necessary to be kind, and it is also necessary to make money! What does it all mean? Do you see how sick I am with it all? I am a thief, an enemy to my brothers —

[A heavy footstep is heard coming down the stairs.

YONKEL stops and they all look toward the door.]

MOISHA. *[frightened]* Some one is coming. Who can it be?

MENDEL. *[Goes to door and opens it.]* It is a policeman, Moisha!

[The POLICEMAN enters and stands at the door, looking about suspiciously.]

POLICEMAN. *[in a big, indulgent voice]* For Gawd's sake!

MOISHA. *[scared]* Abram, you know English! Speak to him!

POLICEMAN. What the hell's going on here? What are you Yits up to anyway?

ABRAM. *[meekly, in singsong, broken Ghetto English]* It's nothing the matter.

POLICEMAN. Why, a feller just come up to me on my

beat and told me there was a lot of Yits down here fighting like cats and dogs.

ABRAM. [*with the same rising, singsong accent*] Fighting? We should be fighting? No, sahr, we was only talking between ourselves, Mister?

POLICEMAN. You must've made a lot of noise with your mouths then! What'che talkin' about at this hour of the night, anyway?

ABRAM. [*shrugging his shoulders*] Oh, I don't know — abaht money?

POLICEMAN. [*bursting into laughter*] Money? Money? That's good. Haw, haw, haw! that's a pippin. A lot of Yits talking at three A.M. in the mornin' — about money! That's rich! Haw, haw, haw! Money!

ABRAM. [*meekly*] Yes, sahr?

POLICEMAN. [*tolerantly, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes*] Well, fellow citizens, blow out the candle, and don't argue no more about money. Leave it for tomorrow's peddlin', see? Go to bed now, an' happy dreams! [*He goes out. ABRAM locks the door after him, stands there a moment, then blows out the candle.*]

ABRAM. [*in Yiddish, in which he has no accent*] He said we should go to sleep. He says we have talked enough. [*They all lie down except YONKEL, who sits up and looks around him.*]

MOISHA. [*kindly*] Sleep, Yonkel, you too!

YONKEL. [*Gives a little sigh and lies down.*] Yes, Moisha.

[*There is a silence as the men shift about their mattresses, each occupied with his thoughts. Then the low, young, tender voice of MENDEL speaks in the darkness.*]

MENDEL. I am younger than all of you, and I have not been a Talmud student like Yonkel, but have

always worked. But once, I remember, I heard a man standing on the street corner here on the East Side, and he was saying that one day there would be no money, no rich and no poor, only every one working together like brothers and sisters.

MOISHA. [*interested*] Yes? Who was the man said that, Mendel?

MENDEL. A Jew. A workingman like ourselves.

ABRAM. [*lifting himself on his elbow*] But Mendel, did he say — [*And the curtain drops as they enter a new discussion on the endless problem of the world's misery and Money!*]

CURTAIN

BACKSTAGE ¹

By Babette Hughes

CHARACTERS

ELLIOT RICHARDS, *Mayor of Rosemont*

ANTOINETTE RICHARDS, *his eighteen-year-old blonde niece.
She wears a light dress and white tam.*

JON EMERY, *a twenty-year-old boy. He wears white flannels
and a blue coat.*

CARLOS EL RADA, *a male dancer about twenty-six. He is in his
shirt-sleeves.*

ANN RUSSELL, *première danseuse, is thirty years old. She has
dark hair worn demurely. She wears an old blue ballet
costume.*

BALLET GIRLS: MITZI, JEAN, DORA, KATE, TILLY, FRIEDA.
*When the play opens they wear practice costumes. Later
they change to white ballet costumes. They represent various
types.*

PLACE. *Backstage of the Rose Theater in Rosemont. A
door at right leads to the dressing rooms. A door at left
leads to the alley. A door at back center leads to the stage.
A piano and piano stool are downstage at right. Several
chairs and a long bench are carelessly placed. The back
wall consists of a row of painted flats, of which the audience
sees the back side.*

TIME. *Half an hour before the evening performance.*

[The curtain lifts, revealing the ballet girls going

¹ Copyright 1929, by Babette Hughes. All rights reserved.
For permission to act this play, apply to Samuel French, 25 West
Forty-Fifth Street, New York.

through their center-floor exercises. CARLOS is watching them from the doorway.]

ANN. [*crisply*] Jetez! Jetez! Jetez! . . . Elevez, pas de bourrée, entre chat! . . . Pas de chat, pas de bourrée, glissade assemblée! . . . ballinez! ballinez!²

[CARLOS wanders over to the piano and strums a medley of popular songs on it.]

ANN. All right, girls. [*The girls relax. MITZI and KATE sink onto chairs. JEAN strolls out, DORA and TILLY at opposite corners do miscellaneous exercises. FRIEDA gets a sandwich from her coat pocket and stands eating it.*]

CARLOS. Get me a ham on rye, Frieda. There's a good egg.

FRIEDA. Give me a dime.

CARLOS. What do you want a dime for?

FRIEDA. What for? Well, I'll tell you. I've got nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars, and ninety cents, and I'd just love to make it a million.

[CARLOS gives her a dime. She leaves. CARLOS switches from jazz to an Indian love lyric.]

CARLOS. [*singing*]

The temple bells are ringing,
The young green corn is springing,
And the marriage month is drawing very near.

MITZI. Yeh? You don't say.

CARLOS.

She is young and very sweet,
From the silver on her feet
To the silver and the flowers in her hair,
And her beauty makes me swoon,
As the Moghra trees at noon
Intoxicate the hot and quivering air.

² "Kick. Lift legs. The Bourrée step. Cat step. Bourrée step. Glide. Pirouette." Most ballet terms are French.

MITZI. You know, his greatest ambition is to sing for the public.

KATE and TILLY. [*together*] Why don't he join the Salvation Army? . . . Join the Salvation Army, kid.

CARLOS. [*enraged*] Listen, brains! that'll be enough. Do you think I'd be traveling with this bunch of trained seals if Ramon Novarro hadn't a gotten jealous and told the yes-man to give me the go-by?

MITZI. We heard that before.

CARLOS. Yeh? Well, you'll probably understand it this time. I suppose you don't believe I was in the movies.

DORA. Sure! Before they changed to women ushers.

[*Girls laugh.*]

ANN. Leave him alone, girls.

CARLOS. Don't think I mind their kidding. It's their lack of artistic appreciation I object to. Why, the only thing that's beautiful to them is a sirloin steak. You take them out for a walk where there's flowers around, daisies and buttercups, and they smell sweet and there's a sunset and the sky's sort of pink and the air peps you up, and what do they say? They don't say, "Ain't it beautiful!" No! They say "Hurry up, before my marcel comes out." That's them! I ain't no poet, but I got appreciation of nature. I like it, see!

DORA. Who says I don't like nature? I always said it was swell.

CARLOS. Sure! You say you like it, but would you quit your job just to walk around in the woods and pick flowers and sleep under the stars? Would you?

MITZI. You got to be cuckoo to do that.

CARLOS. Well, I'd do it and I ain't cuckoo. All the doctors tell you if you'd eat nuts and berries and go barefoot the way the Greeks did you wouldn't be sick or need lipstick or rouge. You'd be beautiful.

TILLY. I'm beautiful enough to suit me without going barefoot. And berries give me hives.

CARLOS. Kid all you want. You know I'm right.

DORA. Well, why don't you quit if you want to? Why don't you sleep under the stars? What's stopping you?

GIRLS. [*in chorus*] Yes. Why don't you?

CARLOS. Why don't I?

MITZI. That's what we said. Right here is all the wide open spaces you can use. See them, out that door? All the buttercups and sunsets and air. What are you staying in here for with us unartistic souls?

ANN. Because he has a contract with me to stay with this show until it hits New York.

TILLY. All them contracts is good for is to burn.

DORA. We're wise to you, big boy. You, with your Adam stuff. Only you ain't got the physique for it.

CARLOS. [*dreamily*] I guess I will.

ANN. What?

CARLOS. Be a bum, I guess is what you call it. You know what I said about sleeping under the stars. I guess I will. I got to; it's the gypsy blood in me. It gets me. You don't know what its like, you New Yorkers.

MITZI. Don't slander me, kid. I was born in Buffalo.

CARLOS. You don't know. It makes you want to bellow when you smell the sea or feel the rain on your hair or hear a waterfall. What's the use of going back to New York where there ain't no sounds but traffic, and the rain is full of soot?

ANN. Carlos, you can't quit me like this.

CARLOS. I got to, I tell you. I knew all along, only I was too yellow. [*He walks out, saying*] There's trees around here, whole forests of them, with trunks eight feet thick and so tall you can't see the top. Gee! [*The girls look at him as though he were crazy.*]

ANN. Now we're out of luck! We can cut his dance numbers, but there's not a man on the place to pack up. What was the idea of talking him into quitting?

DORA. We didn't know. Honest, Ann. We thought he was just talking through his hat.

TILLY. Sure we did. Anyway he'll come back; they always do. He'll drink a lemon coc; then he'll get to thinking about the twenty bucks you owe him, and then he'll forget he quit.

ANN. I don't know. But its ten to eight now. The curtain's in twenty minutes and the house is sold.

FRIEDA. Hurrah, lots of Rosemont Romeos! A lobster supper for this baby. W'at, old bean? [*She slaps KATE on the back.*]

KATE. Aren't you the cutie! Whose radiator cap did you fall off of?

ANN. Go get dressed, all of you. I'll find Carlos and try to talk him around. If I can't we'll substitute another "Blue Danube" for the gypsy number.

MITZI. [*putting her arm around ANN as they leave*] What's the dif? He's no hoofer! And there's three thousand thirty-seven scene shifters out of work in New York alone.

ANN. But not in Rosemont.

[*When the stage is clear, the alley door opens slowly, and TONY appears. JON follows her.*]

TONY. Jon, isn't it exciting? Oh! [*She twirls ecstatically.*] I'm going on the stage! I'm going on the stage! [*She sobers.*] Jon, to think what I might have missed; what Father and you want me to miss. I could cry when I think of . . . staying home . . . here . . . and never being like one of them. Aren't they darling, Jon? Aren't they pretty? But they're no prettier than I am. [*JON smiles.*] That's not conceit, it's true. I am pretty. I can dance. Madame said I'd learned

everything she could teach me. [*She does a dance step.*]

JON. Tony, would you have gone away . . . without telling me, if I hadn't met you just now and asked you to go swimming? Would you, Tony? [*TONY averts her face.*] Was it because you thought I'd try to stop you? I wouldn't have.

TONY. Really, Jon? I thought you'd tell me I had to stay here, the way Father and Uncle Elliot do. You do want me to stay! Don't you?

JON. Not if you don't want to. If you loved me the way I do you . . . you'd stay.

TONY. No I wouldn't. I do love you. See! [*She kisses him.*] I do. But it's so dull here, Jon. I want some excitement; I want to dance. I want to be like them, and see New York and have fun . . . and know my onions. Why don't you want to? Why do you stay here?

JON. I like it here in the West. The East isn't the same. It's not big and free and young. I'll go to New York sometime; but I want to live here and own my own garage, and marry you. If you do go East you'll be homesick. See if you aren't! You've lived here so long you don't realize how much you like it. That's the way it is, Tony. Don't you see?

TONY. No, darling, I don't. [*They stand in silent conflict. ANN and JEAN enter.*]

ANN. We can manage without him tonight, I guess. But we'll need some one to help pack up and move.

TONY. Look, Jon. Promise you won't try to keep her from taking me. Promise. Are you Ann Russell? [*Ann nods.*] I want to join your company.

ANN. Oh! [*She is looking at JON.*]

TONY. I've always admired you so much, and wanted to dance with you. Do you want to see what I can do? I'm not half bad, really.

[JEAN is leaning against the wall and flirting with JON.]

ANN. Just a minute, dear. What is your name, young man?

JON. Jon Emery.

ANN. It's obvious you could move scenery. Would you?

TONY. But he only came with me. It's I who want to join your company.

JEAN. Girls are so plentiful. And why must they all dance!

ANN. We need a man to pack the sets and costumes after the show tonight. Will you do it, Mr. Emery?

JON. Why, yes.

ANN. And travel with us in that capacity? I could teach you to support me in the ballet in a few numbers if you cared to learn. Your build is right. The man I had just quit, so I'd be very grateful to you.

TONY. No, he won't. He can't dance; he's a garage mechanic. Anyway, why should he? There are plenty of other men in this town.

ANN. Very well.

JON. Don't mind her, Miss Russell. I'll help you out tonight, but I'll have to consider the idea of going on the road. Thank you, though, for the chance.

ANN. Fine! After the show then. [*She goes to the piano and plays softly.*]

TONY. [*to JON*] I hate you.

JON. Why, Tony? I'm only taking your advice. I should think you'd be glad. You won't stay here and marry me; why should I stay?

TONY. You're only going because you're flattered that she wants you, and because of the girls. I know. Now, I wouldn't marry you for anything in the world. I hate you.

JEAN. Mr. Emery, would you like to see the stage?

[JON follows JEAN out. TONY, after a minute, runs after them. MITZI enters in ballet costume. There is a knock on the door; she answers it. MAYOR RICHARDS enters.]

MITZI. Yes?

MAYOR. [*dazzled by her costume*] Er . . . how do you do. [*Pulls himself up.*] I want to speak to the head of this outfit.

ANN. I own the show.

MAYOR. Well, Miss . . .

ANN. Russell.

MAYOR. My name is Richards. I'm the mayor of Rosemont. I came down to see if this show should be allowed to go on tonight. The church says no! There's quite a civil war on, in fact, between the congregation represented by Dr. Marner, and Sam Pollin, who owns the pool hall. Dr. Marner's dead set against a show of this sort.

ANN. Of what sort?

MAYOR. This sort. [*He indicates the brevity of MITZI's costume.*] I told them I'd come down, and if after I'd looked it over it didn't come up to our standards, I'd censor it.

ANN. But Mayor Richards, what can you want to censor? The dances are respectable; the morals of my company are irreproachable; the costumes are as modest as is compatible with dancing. Ballet skirts are, after all, traditionally short.

MAYOR. Not in Rosemont. [*ANN smiles.*] Smile if you like. I am the mayor. If I stop your show it stays stopped.

ANN. But you can't, really. We've sold out the house. We go on in ten minutes. Surely, if the people of Rosemont buy seats to our show, you, the representative of the people, should not ban it.

MAYOR. Representative of the people, you say? I am also their guardian. Dr. Marner told me that against his wishes the young men of his congregation were flocking here. He begged me not to allow their morals to be corrupted. While I do not always side with Dr. Marner, I respect his judgment.

ANN. I swear to you this show will corrupt no one.

MAYOR. According to your standards, yes. You are from New York. Who knows what worse sights are available there? Here, the people are innocent; they are unused to spectacles such as this young woman . . .

MITZI. I'm no spectacle, you old goat!

MAYOR. And you say your company is not vulgar? But that is neither here nor there. I forbid the performance.

ANN. Oh!

MAYOR. I'm sorry to do this.

ANN. Please, won't you reconsider? Think of the disappointment of your people.

MITZI. Sure! And think of our salaries.

MAYOR. I'm sorry. I dislike the position this puts me in. I wanted Dr. Marner to come down, but he had to minister to a dying parishioner. The chief of police is fishing. Believe me, I had rather be your friend than your enemy.

ANN. If you only would. [*She goes up to him and puts her hand on his arm.*] This will cost me five hundred dollars. You're a business man; you won't put me five hundred dollars in the red? You won't!

MAYOR. It's unfortunate, but inevitable. I cannot betray my office or my conscience. [*ANN sighs. Voices are heard offstage. TONY runs in, pulling JON.*]

TONY. Miss Russell, Jon won't go along unless you take me. Tell her, Jon. [*The MAYOR turns toward her.*] Uncle Elliot, what are you doing here?

MAYOR. Tony! Go home at once. How dare you come down here!

TONY. I'm of age.

MAYOR. You're a willful child. [*to JON*] Did you bring her?

JON. No, sir. I came with her.

TONY. Don't be dramatic, Uncle Elliot. I came here of my own free will to ask Miss Russell to take me in her ballet. [*to ANN*] And you're going to, aren't you? Jon won't go without me, you see. Are you?

ANN. Yes, my dear, I think I am.

MAYOR. I forbid it.

TONY. You can't. You're my uncle and the mayor, but you have no control over me. So there! Come on, Jon, I won't listen to any more of this hot parental line. [*She pulls JON on to the stage. ANN starts to play the piano.*]

MAYOR. [*after a minute*] Miss Russell.

ANN. Yes.

MAYOR. You don't really mean to employ Tony?

ANN. Why, certainly.

MAYOR. It's nonsense. She's a stage-struck child. You wouldn't ruin her life.

ANN. I don't consider my own ruined. Is she too good for the stage?

MAYOR. I didn't say that. But you mustn't take her. I have no control over her; her father has none. Her mother is dead. Miss Russell, you are the only person with authority to stop her.

[*ANN shrugs her shoulders. She continues to play softly. The MAYOR goes to her.*]

MAYOR. I don't ordinarily ask favors, Miss Russell; I accord them.

ANN. Now I know where Tony gets her self-confidence.

MAYOR. I won't ask favors now. I'll strike a bargain with you, as one business man to another.

ANN. [*swinging around to face him*] You'll not ban the show?

MAYOR. I'll let the performance proceed — if you tell Tony she must stay home.

ANN. [*resuming her playing*] So you are willing to betray your conscience.

MAYOR. No! Yes; but only for the sake of my family name.

ANN. How very aristocratic of you. Only a blue-stocking could be so unscrupulously proud. Tell me, did they come over on the "Mayflower"?

MAYOR. They came in covered wagons over the Oregon Trail, Miss Russell, if that is of any interest to you. And now, do you agree to my proposition?

ANN. What else is there for me to do?

MAYOR. That's settled then: Tony stays home. [*He gets his hat, hesitates, then comes back to ANN.*] Don't think I'm hard, Miss Russell. Surely it makes no difference to you whether Tony dances or not.

ANN. I ran away from home — just such a home. I danced, and I am content with my life.

MAYOR. Tony is a headstrong child. She wants excitement, not to work hard and become a great dancer. When she found that it wasn't all fun, she'd drop it. She hasn't courage or ambition. It's best for her to stay here and marry Jon.

ANN. Do you know, that was what I was told. No girl who is pretty or who wants a dancing career is ever credited with courage. If she wanted to be a stenographer, I suppose you'd think she had all the courage and determination in the world.

MAYOR. If she wanted to be a stenographer, I'd know she had no illusions, because there is no glamour

connected with that profession. Aside from that, Miss Russell, are you really content? Don't you sometimes wish you had married, that you had children and a home?

ANN. I have children, Mayor Richards — two darling ones. My husband is dead. He was my orchestra leader. If you want to see the pictures of my infants, you can come after the performance and take me to supper. [*She turns and smiles at him.*] Will you?

MAYOR. [*taking her hand*] I will, with pleasure. Miss Russell, if Tony were like you. . . . [*JEAN enters*] I think I'd better go. [*He exits. TONY and JON enter.*]

TONY. I heard you. [*She glares resentfully.*] Oh! I wish I weren't a lady, so I could tell you what I thought of you. And I liked you so much; I thought you were a good sport. [*JON takes her hand soothingly; she snatches it away.*] No matter how long I stay here . . . a hundred thousand years . . . I'll never marry him. Never! I won't be mated like a prize poodle. I won't.

ANN. Listen, Tony! It's too bad you overheard us, because I don't like having it known what a despicable person I am. I do lie sometimes, but this time it wasn't to you but to your uncle.

TONY. You're not going to keep your promise to him?

JON. You are going to take Tony in the company?

ANN. I'm going to give her a chance, because once I wanted the same chance, and got it. But it was good business to lie to your uncle. Otherwise he would have stopped the show. We can't afford that.

TONY. I don't know what to think. You're just as dishonorable as I thought you were. But now I don't mind. You'll forgive what I said, won't you?

ANN. Since it was true, yes. Come out on the stage

now. While I talk to the electrician, you can try a few steps. Come along, Jean, and coach her.

TONY. [*hanging back*] Jon, do you mind what I said? I didn't mean it. You will come with me. You have to! If you want, you can kiss me. [*He does, then she runs out. TILLY and FRIEDA and CARLOS enter.*]

TILLY. [*to CARLOS*] You still here? I thought you quit.

FRIEDA. Yes, so did I.

CARLOS. Say you! Half an hour ago I ordered a sandwich. Have you forgotten it . . . have I had it . . . or didn't I order it?

FRIEDA. Gee! I tied a string around my finger, too. [*She goes out.*]

TILLY. [*to JON*] Hello, sugar! Mr. el Rada, meet Mr. Emery. He's the boy that gets your job.

CARLOS. Hello, stout fella! as they say in that land of indoor tan and galloping celluloids called Hollywood. [*JON holds out his hand. CARLOS starts to take it, then salutes instead.*]

JON. You quit?

TILLY. He's taking a flier back to nature. [*CARLOS spits on floor.*] Don't spit on the floor.

CARLOS. What's the matter — floor leak? [*to JON*] Honest, though, I am fed up with this business. Nothing but wise-crackers. And the hours are fierce. [*He and JON talk quietly. FRIEDA enters with a sandwich, which she gives to CARLOS.*]

FRIEDA. [*to JON*] Hello, sugar! Want a mama? [*JON laughs.*]

TILLY. Who do you think you are? America's sweetheart?

FRIEDA. I'm the spirit of the income tax. Watch my figure! [*She and TILLY sit down and talk quietly.*]

CARLOS. [*giving half his sandwich to JON*] Here. You

look sort of sunk, kid. What's the matter? The girls fuss you?

JON. No. I'm used to girls. I run a garage and filling station. But I never thought yesterday today would shape up the way it has. Funny, isn't it?

CARLOS. Yes. Do you like the West, kid?

JON. Do I like it? Sure thing! I sort of thought if things go well and I ever get the cash I'd put up a good brick garage with grass around, you know, and flowers, and I'd make all the fellows wear white. It would look great, wouldn't it?

CARLOS. Sure thing! It's funny, but I was never much for fooling around busses. You got to be that way. I think it's great, though, if you like it. Now there's something about the show business, the birds in it, and the patter and the excitement, that gets me going. I guess you wouldn't see it, now would you?

JON. Sure thing! And I thought if I got the garage, the brick one, then I'd put up a house, one of these white Spanish ones. I've seen pictures of them. And have kids. [*He stops suddenly.*] But now I guess I won't.

CARLOS. Why not? Girl's given you the go-by?

JON. She wants to dance; she doesn't want to stay here. She wants to belong to this show. Gee, I don't know what I'll do.

CARLOS. Tell her she's got to stay. No, I guess that won't do it. So that's why you've joined up — to be with her. I was wondering. You don't look like a hoofer. Got a heavy crush, have you?

JON. I love her so much that . . . I can't help it. It's like dope, I guess. And she's so darned pretty and cute. I don't know what I'd do if she went. Gee! [*He puts his head in his hands.*]

CARLOS. Buck up, kid.

JON. She likes me, too. Only she's young, you know

—eighteen; and she thinks she wants to go to New York and have fun, she said. I'd let her have fun if she'd stay here. We'd have a lot of fun.

CARLOS. It's funny, but I never got that way. Because I've seen so many ratty females, I guess. It's spoilt me for the species. But sometimes I get to feeling that way about . . . well, nature. Sometimes I'd rather be on a boat seeing the waves and hearing them, than make the Bigtime. Honest! Crazy, isn't it? That's why I quit tonight. But listen, kid, you don't belong in this line. I do, I was born in it. You got to be, or else be sort of cuckoo. You're not. Now, my folks was theatricals, trapeze artists, and they hooked me on when I was a year old. I've stuck ever since. But you're just not the sort. You'd better get out while the getting's good. You belong in a garage, see?

JON. But I can't let her go without me. I can't. She's so young and cute.

CARLOS. I'm for you, kid. And that means I'd take back my job, just to keep you out of it. Come on, we're going over and absorb a couple of cocs. [*They exit.*]

TILLY. I'm a bologny if he ain't going to join up again.

FRIEDA. Yes. You know, Carlos isn't a bad sort when you get on to him. Goofy, that's all. I guess Spaniards is that way. Pretty decent of him to keep the kid out of vaudeville. He's right, too. The boy's not built for it. Gee! How he is hipped over that blonde jane!

TILLY. Yeh. Hey, Ann!

FRIEDA. What are you bellowing for?

TILLY. Ann! [*ANN enters, followed by TONY.*]
Your hoofer's joined up again.

ANN. What! Carlos?

FRIEDA. Right the first time!

[*Offstage the orchestra starts playing the overture.*]

TILLY. Wow! I've got to splash my makeup on.

FRIEDA. Jean's at the concessions. I'll go get her.

[*TILLY and FRIEDA dash out.*]

TONY. If Carlos is going, you won't need Jon, will you? I'll miss him, I guess. I wish he was going, too. We'd have such fun together in New York.

ANN. Then you do love him?

TONY. Yes . . . but I love my art better.

ANN. Listen, dear! If I had time I'd be more kind. But there's only a minute until the curtain. So I'll have to tell you in a hurry. I promised to give you a chance, because I thought, if you could dance, you should. [*She pauses.*]

TONY. Then . . . I can't?

ANN. No, Tony. You've studied from a second-class teacher. Your technique is bad. It would take years to undo all the bad habits you've formed, before you could start to really learn.

TONY. I don't believe it. How do I know you're not lying again?

ANN. Because I'm a dancer, which makes me conscientious on that subject. I wouldn't lie to you now, dear. If you had any possibilities at all, I'd tell you. Don't take it too hard. There are plenty of compensations in life. [*She leaves.*]

TONY. Then all I'm good for is to stay in Rosemont. [*CARLOS enters.*]

CARLOS. Hello, little milkmaid. Why the weeps? Your papa loves you; still want to leave him?

TONY. I'm not interested in him; I prefer cosmopolitan men who know how to treat a girl. Maybe I can't dance, but I can still go to New York. [*She coyly edges toward him.*] Tell me about Broadway.

[*He moves away. She pursues him.*] Would I like it? Am I as pretty as New York girls?

CARLOS. Get wise to yourself, young un! You're a sweet little prairie flower; and while I like little prairie flowers, I don't pick them. They don't belong in New York. Now I'd love to stay and be a prairie flower with you, but I haven't the time. I've got a job on my hands. So you toddle over to the corner and hide your face till I get out of the room. [TONY stands up, enraged. *The ballet girls come noisily in.*]

MITZI. What are you doing to the little peroxide, Carlos?

TONY. I'm not a peroxide; it's naturally gold. All my ancestors were blonds.

JEAN. Ah! She comes of preferred stock!

[*The girls laugh. ANN enters. They line up behind her. She gives the signal and they dance offstage. The sound of clapping is heard, and music.*]

CARLOS. Gee, I've got to quick-change! [*He dashes out. Offstage he says*] Jon, your baby's in there, crying for you.

[*TONY stands with her face to the wall. JON enters slowly. There is a long silence.*]

JON. Hello! [TONY doesn't answer.] Well, I guess I'll go over and work on Jackson's Ford. He wants it in the morning. [JON waits. TONY is silent.] Say, Tony. [*He goes toward her. In trying to evade him she trips over the piano stool.*] Look out there. What are you trying to do? Break the furniture? [TONY holds her foot and cries. He starts to pat her on the shoulder, then decides not to.] Well, good-by. [*He starts off. TONY waits until he is offstage, then runs after him. In a second they come back. JON's arm is around her. She picks up her white tam, which she has forgotten, and puts it on. Jon watches her admiringly. Tony goes over to the stage*

door and peeps through. The orchestra is still playing.]

TONY. My children are going to study with a real dancer.

JON. Kids, Tony? Gosh! [*He picks her up and kisses her.*]

CURTAIN

THE SONG OF SOLOMON ¹

By Mark O'Dea

PERSONS IN THE PLAY ²

SOLOMON SYKES, *a farmer*
MARY SYKES, *his wife*
MRS. SMITHERS, }
MRS. BAMBERGER, }
MR. KERNS, *the minister* *neighbors*

There is one farm just outside of Red Bud which always commands the admiration of passers-by. Beyond the well-kept fencing, past the productive fields, the eye wanders to the unusually fine buildings.

The barn is particularly large, really monumental, with towering silos. There are numerous buildings, all spick and span, grouped around this "show" barn. An estate, one surmises. And one looks for a handsome house, rising midst the small grove of trees.

Were one to wander into the lane that stretches quite a distance from the highway and approach this group of buildings, one would be disappointed in not finding a palatial home.

For the house is a low, built-on affair that has just grown from a tiny cottage into a larger. It is conspicuously in-

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² *The Song of Solomon* was presented for the first time by the Arts Club of Chicago, November 9, 1920.

appropriate midst the grandeur of its surroundings. Yet it is not a hovel. It is a comfortable enough old house, possibly not such a misfit on the average farm, but long since entirely inadequate for such a place as this.

For years this farm has been "a steady earner." Its owner, SOLOMON SYKES, is rated as one of the richest farmers in the community. Year after year he has improved it; yet he has always banked a portion of each year's yield. In this way he has built up a secondary income — his banker has recommended farm mortgages, and many farms in the county, and beyond, pay interest to MR. SYKES.

But people say that he is "a hard man to get along with." He has always been "mighty tight-mouthed." Nobody knows his resources, not even his family. He is not altogether a miser, but the years of hard work in developing this farm have made him extremely cautious, and having always been dependent upon self, he is as thrifty as he is industrious.

He is proud of his farm. He is proud of his position in the community. He is proud of having "riz his family right" and of having set up his sons on neighboring farms.

But he is strangely negligent as to personal comforts. He has forgotten to build a home, or he has just been putting it off year after year. A new house has always been "next year" for a long, long time. For every year there has been something else; and always that something else has meant more acreage, or finer cattle, or additional machinery, or tiling, or anything but a house.

Until now — there are just two of them, MR. and MRS. SYKES, and they are getting along in years, and the old house has sheltered a bigger family when the children were at home. And it is a "sorta comfortable-like" place. And its a big job "to up and build a new house with all these new-fangled idees."

"But I'd think," says MRS. SMITHERS to MRS. BAMBERGER, "that SOL SYKES would be ashamed of such an old rattletrap." They are walking down the lane toward the house on this hot July morning. "And so would I," agrees MRS. BAMBERGER, "'cause he's so proud and mighty-tighty."

As they approach the house, their conversation becomes more quiet and confidential. As they come around the side of the house to the rear, we again pick up the thread of their gossip.

The back porch and the yard are not very well kept; in fact, this is the worst part of the farm, the greatest contrast. Through the back porch we can see into the kitchen, a big, old-fashioned room with a large range. Out in the yard, on one side of the porch, are a wash bench, with tubs on it and an old washing machine. Opposite are an old grindstone, a rickety bench, and a discarded milk stool. There is also a dilapidated, weather-beaten rocking-chair.

There is little grass — the yard is worn down to the bare earth around the porch. But the spot is shady and inviting on such a hot morning, and MRS. SMITHERS and MRS. BAMBERGER have planned to make it an oasis on their journey over to the harvesting.

They are middle-aged farm women, dressed in their everyday clothes of wash-goods. MRS. SMITHERS is rather sour and peppery, while MRS. BAMBERGER is motherly and genial.

As they come round the house, MRS. SMITHERS is telling MRS. BAMBERGER "the latest."

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, I heard that Mis' Jones said that she wouldn't let her daughter marry him, even if he did come back.

MRS. BAMBERGER. My goodness! Has he skipped out?

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, didn't you hear that? Well, I'll tell you what I heard Mis' McIntire say — you know she knows his sister. Well, she said he'd be willin' to marry her if — s-sh, I'll tell you later. [*They reach the back of the house and come into view.*] I wonder where Mis' Sykes is. I'll jest look in her kitchen. No, she ain't there — mebbe she's upstairs. Oh, I'm so hot, ain't you? Let's set down a minute and cool off. [*They go over to the bench and sit down.* MRS. SMITHERS *leans over confidentially.*] Have you noticed anything queer about Mis' Sykes?

MRS. BAMBERGER. Queer? No, nothin' particular. Have you?

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, no, can't say as I have. But people — well, some are sorta wonderin' — you know she don't come to church any more.

MRS. BAMBERGER. She ain't been very well lately. Sort-a porely-like.

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, I know, but —

MRS. BAMBERGER. She's allus readin' her Bible, ain't she, even if she don't go to meetin's.

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, but —

MRS. BAMBERGER. Well . . . ?

MRS. SMITHERS. I didn't mean to tell you — but don't you tell nobody — now.

MRS. BAMBERGER. No, I won't.

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, she has been sort-a queer-like lately.

MRS. BAMBERGER. You mean more'n usual for a woman that's growin' on sixty?

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, some one told me. Oh, I don't know whether I should repeat it or not.

MRS. BAMBERGER. I promised not to tell.

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, this is what I heard. Folks as has been passin' by say Mis' Sykes has been screamin'

something terrible — right in the middle of the day — when she was all alone here — when the men folks were in the field. Oh, such awful screams — like as if she was bein' murdered.

MRS. BAMBERGER. Does Sol Sykes know it?

MRS. SMITHERS. No.

MRS. BAMBERGER. How do you know?

MRS. SMITHERS. Folks have sort-a hinted to him, askin' if she was well, and the likes. He allus says she is the same as ever.

MRS. BAMBERGER. Well, that ain't proof that he don't know.

MRS. SMITHERS. If he knows, he's keepin' it a secret. But I'm sure he don't know. Men are so wrapped up in farmin' — you know how it is. They don't pay any 'tention to such things — like as not if he heered it in the distance, as he comes up to the house, he'd think it singin'. And she'd be keerful to stop when she saw him comin'.

MRS. BAMBERGER. Well, if that's all there is to it, he'll find out sooner or later. Howsoever, I don't believe there's a word of truth in it, do you? She's jest the same as ever, so far as I know. I never seen her do anything queer. And I like Mis' Sykes; she's been a mighty good neighbor for all these years. Why, when I had Jessie, and that doctor was away gallivantin' in the next county, it was Mis' Sykes as come right in and took his place. I'll never fergit *that* to my dyin' day.

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, she's a mighty good Methodist.

MRS. BAMBERGER. Methodist? What's that gotta do with her takin' care of me and my baby?

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, I jest meant that she was kind to everybody.

MRS. BAMBERGER. You bet she is. And if anybody

says to me that she's actin' queer-like, I know what I'll say to them, the busybodies! And you stop such talk — now won't you, Mis' Smithers, please do. It ain't right.

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, I don't know whether to believe it or not. It seems so strange.

MRS. BAMBERGER. I wonder *where* she is. Mebbe I'd better call her or go into —

[MRS. SYKES'S voice is heard as she comes to the kitchen door. She comes to the edge of the porch with the Bible in her hand, reading. She does not see her visitors at first. They sit, transfixed in astonishment. She is a person of sixty, a little thin woman, with tightly combed white hair. She is in a calico wrapper, with an apron. She epitomizes at a glance her sixty years of work on the farm, her privations, her drudgery. There is infinite sadness in her face, immeasurable pathos. What she reads, however, is not in her natural tone. It seems strangely reminiscent of youth. It is only after finishing it that one is struck with its unnaturalness, as she lapses into her everyday life.]

MRS. SYKES. "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy and black as a raven.

His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of water, washed with milk, and fitly set.

His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers.

His lips like lilies, dropping with sweet myrrh.

His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl;
his . . ."

MRS. SMITHERS. [*in a whisper*] "The Song of Solomon!"

[MRS. SYKES stops. She has heard the whisper and glances around as in a trance, until she suddenly sees her visitors. She is embarrassed, hiding her Bible under her apron, not knowing just what to do or say. She is as a person caught in the act of doing something wrong.]

MRS. SYKES. Why — why — I never knew you were here! I — well, I —

MRS. BAMBERGER. Oh, we jest was goin' over to the threshin' to help at the cook wagon, gettin' dinner . . . and we got so hot we jest thought we'd drop in fer a minute and see you. We jest come.

MRS. SYKES. You jest come?

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, jest this minute.

MRS. SYKES. I must git you a glass of water.

MRS. BAMBERGER. Now, don't, Mis' Sykes, don't bother. Jest set down here with us a bit. How are you these days? The heat's perty bad, ain't it, Mis' Sykes?

MRS. SMITHERS. I think the dust is worse, and the flies. I said to Mr. Smithers —

MRS. SYKES. I keep pretty well. You know I'm never sick. Just bilious-like onct in a while. But not much lately. [to MRS. SMITHERS] Are *you* bilious, Mis' Smithers? Sody's good.

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, I ain't exactly bilious. But I got something like it. Seems I allus got somethin' or other. I'm mighty porely, you know. I jest git so tired takin' all that medicine; it never seems to do any good. 'Pears to me like I've sampled 'em all in the drug store. Somebody said I orta take up Christian Science.

[*This revolutionary thought creates astonishment.*]

MRS. BAMBERGER. Why, Mis' Smithers, what an idee!

MRS. SYKES. Christian Science? You? Such a good Methodist?

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, I jest said somebody said I *orta*. That's no sign I am.

MRS. BAMBERGER. But how kin you even mention it? It gives decent folks such a start. [*Just then the Bible falls from under MRS. SYKES's apron, right on the ground in front of them all. She picks it up hurriedly, in confusion.*] If you'd read your Bible, like Mis' Sykes, you'd be better off.

MRS. SMITHERS. [*cattishly*] Readin' what she reads?

[MRS. BAMBERGER glares at her. MRS. SYKES looks questioningly at the two women as if she must say something to justify the reading of "*The Song of Solomon*."]]

MRS. SYKES. Maybe you don't understand.

MRS. BAMBERGER. Understand? Why, you don't have to explain, Mis' Sykes.

[MRS. SMITHERS gives a disdainful grunt.]

MRS. SYKES. Maybe you want to know, Mis' Smithers, why I'm readin' "*The Song of Solomon*"?

MRS. SMITHERS. [*rather sourly*] Well, it strikes me as a peculiar part to be readin'.

MRS. SYKES. Peculiar? Why, it's the loveliest part of the Bible! [*This is indeed scandalous, as the looks of the two visitors show.*] I read it every anniversary!

MRS. BAMBERGER AND MRS. SMITHERS. Anniversary?

MRS. SYKES. Yes. Today's our weddin' anniversary. Sol and me's been married now forty-three years — forty-three years — forty-three years.

[*This she repeats slowly, as though the whole panorama of the past were flashing by. The visitors watch her as she gazes off into space, rather trance-like.*]

MRS. SMITHERS. [*addressing* MRS. BAMBERGER] I don't see the point, do you?

MRS. SYKES. [*as if coming back to consciousness of her surroundings.*] I don't mind telling you, sence you're such old friends. *Some* folks wouldn't understand. But *you* will.

MRS. BAMBERGER. [*gently.*] Sure, we will, Mis' Sykes. You jest tell us all about your weddin' anniversary and "The Song of Solomon."

MRS. SMITHERS. I would certainly like to know, bein' as we all belong to the same congregation.

MRS. SYKES. Well, the church is got a lot to do with it. Not our new church. But the one that stood in its place forty-three years ago — so long ago — so long ago. Why, I was seventeen, then, and it was jest such a day as this, a beautiful day. It was a Sunday mornin', jest about this hour. . . .

[MRS. SYKES *gains in spirit, becoming more alert, less tired looking. A stray sun shaft pierces the shadows and illumines her face, somewhat enlivening her ashen complexion. She looks years younger.*]

I had known the Sykeses since I was a child. One of the boys had allus been sorta nice to me, but it never meant nothin' to me. I didn't understand. Our family and the Sykes family were at church that mornin'. One of the Sykes boys sat next to me. I liked him that mornin' as we sat there, listenin' to the sermon. Then came the long, silent prayer. They used to be longer than they are now. And we prayed on our knees, too. Jest when we got ready to pray — the awfulest thing happened! That Sykes boy opened a Bible and put it down right in front of me. He pointed to it, so friendly-like. It was "*The Song of Solomon.*" And it was Solomon Sykes that handed me that Bible. Of course,

I should have closed it and gone on prayin'. But somethin' within me — some sort of spirit — glued my eyes to the pages. I read on. I read on. It was a revelation. I grew from a girl to a woman there in that church, with my head bowed down as if in prayer. I dared not look up. I couldn't. I felt as if I wanted to walk out of that church with my eyes shut, and go to some place all by myself and think — and think. When the prayer was over, I sat there as in a trance. I never heard another word of the services. At the end I got up, hopin' to get out easily, but knowin' that Sol was watchin' me every minute. When we got to the door, he came to me — there with my family around — and asked, jest as polite-like as if nothin' had happened, if he could see me home in his buggy. And I went. We rode off in silence — nary a word. But we didn't go far. We came to the walnut grove — long sence cut down. We got out — I seemed to obey as if some power controlled me. We went and set down there in the woods. Then he popped the question right there. And I said I'd be his wife. I can't tell you *all* about it — that I will keep my own secret — maybe it wasn't so different from other proposals, but it allus seemed so to *me*. Because we talked about "The Song of Solomon." He said it was as if writ for *us*. And so we were married — forty-three years ago. And every anniversary I read "The Song of Solomon." It takes me back over this long, long happiness; it brings back all that God has give me. He is good. He has been so good to me. And to my Sol and to my children. And to everybody. [MRS. BAMBERGER *is crying*. MRS. SMITHERS *is in a nervous quandary*.] Oh, friends, let us pray — let us pray.

MRS. SMITHERS. Not here in the yard, surely?

MRS. SYKES. Why not? All is God. God is all.

MRS. SMITHERS. [*fidgeting*] I think we'd better be goin'. Don't you, Mis' Bamberger?

[MRS. SYKES *gazes abstractedly into space, as if her mind has again gone back to that Sunday morning so many years ago. MRS. BAMBERGER sits subdued, wiping her tears away. She then rises and goes over to MRS. SYKES, putting her arm around her shoulder.*]

MRS. BAMBERGER. I understand, Mis' Sykes, I understand.

[MRS. SYKES *looks at her appreciatively, realizing that here is a friend indeed, a friend who understands.*]

MRS. SYKES. You understand?

MRS. BAMBERGER. Yes, yes, I understand. You and me will talk about it again some time. But now, we must be goin'.

[MRS. SYKES *comes out of her reminiscent mood quickly, becoming the solicitous hostess again.*]

MRS. SYKES: I *must* get you a drink. Jest a minute. I'll fetch some.

MRS. BAMBERGER. No. Let *me*. [MRS. BAMBERGER *goes into kitchen, and returning with pail and tin cup, passes a drink to each.*]

MRS. SMITHERS. Heared Mr. Sykes was gonna buy a tractor.

MRS. SYKES. [*surprised*] A tractor? Oh, no, that's a mistake. He ain't gonna buy one. Why, they cost over a thousand dollars. Besides, we got all those horses which we gotta have for cultivatin'. Tractor's mostly for plowin'. We couldn't have the horses standin' 'round eatin' their heads off most of the year, jest to do the cultivatin' and odd jobs. A tractor ain't like horses. Ain't handy enough. Jest good for plowin'.

MRS. SMITHERS. Well, I heered my husband tell one of the hands that the salesman told him that Mr. Sykes had been talkin' pretty seriously.

MRS. BAMBERGER. [*noting* MRS. SYKES's *worry*] Oh, it's jest probably talk, nothin' else. Mis' Sykes orta know.

MRS. SYKES. I'd rather have a 'lectric lightin' plant, one of them new riggin's. They don't cost as much, neither. Only about four hundred dollars.

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, but that ain't *all*. The salesman told my husband that the wirin' cost a lot. And Mr. Smithers says to me, he says: "Well, even that ain't all. If I bought one of those rigs I'd have to put in a bathroom and all the plumbin'. I'd have to buy a 'lectric washin' machine," he says. "And a 'lectric iron. And rig it up with a tank so's to have running water right in the house. And a sink in the kitchen. Well," my husband says, "it would be jest like livin' in the city." And I jest kept at him, so now he's gonna buy one right after harvest. No more lamps! No more trapesin' outa doors in all kinds of weather to the pump. Runnin' water! And a bathtub! And lights out in the yard! And at the barn! I tell you, it's great!

[*During this oration* MRS. SYKES *listens eagerly, like a child thrilled at some marvelous description of a coming circus.*]

MRS. SYKES. Oh, it must be wonderful!

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, and I'd think *you'd* be the first to have one. Why, they're puttin' 'em in all over the country. Here, you've got the finest farm in the neighborhood, fine fencin' and barns and cattle and an ottamobile and everything *else*. I say to Mr. Smithers that I want to enjoy things as I go along. Shrouds ain't got no pockets. We can't take our money with us when we pass on. Why, I was readin' one of them advertise-

ments, and it was headed: "Free Yourself from Household Drudgery." And it showed pitchers of how a 'lectric plant eased a body's work. And it's jest a little gasoline engine and some 'lectrical fixin's, all sort-a small, an' it goes right in the cellar and runs itself. I think it's jest like magic.

MRS. BAMBERGER. We *must* be gittin' along.

MRS. SMITHERS. It makes me mad that city wimmen's got all sech and think nothin' of it. I tell you, if them suffragettes that go paradin' around would jest spend their time and money helpin' their sisters on the farm, it would do more for us than votes ever can. We don't need to be trained to vote as much as our men folks need to be trained how to loosen up a little around the house. Why, the house is always the very last thing — everything else comes first with the men. One gits in a livable house jest about when one's gittin' ready to lay down in a coffin. It ain't right! I says to Mr. Smithers, I says —

MRS. BAMBERGER. We *must* go, Mis' Smithers.

MRS. SMITHERS. Yes, we must go. Good-by, Mis' Sykes. You must come over an' see me. I want to tell you what *I* said to Mr. Smithers when *he* said to me that —

MRS. BAMBERGER. Good-by, Mis' Sykes. I'm comin'in to see you again soon. Many happy returns of the day. Come, Mis' Smithers.

MRS. SMITHERS. Oh, I fergot. Yes, many happy returns of the day, Mis' Sykes. Good-by.

MRS. SYKES. Good-by, Mis' Bamberger. Good-by, Mis' Smithers. Come again.

[MRS. SYKES *sits down in the weather-beaten rocking chair and rocks back and forth with a happy expression. One doesn't know whether she is thinking about "The Song of Solomon" or the electric*

plant. Finally she opens the Bible and begins reading again.]

MRS. SYKES. "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, and as a seal upon thine arm, for love is strong as death. My beloved is —"

[MR. SYKES comes around the corner of the house with the mail. He is a little, old man, bent with years of labor. He is in work clothes.]

MR. SYKES. Hello, Mary, here's the mail. Not much. No letters from the children. Is dinner ready? [He notes the open Bible on her lap.] Ain't you readin' the Bible an awful lot lately, Mary? How do you find time?

MRS. SYKES. Dinner? Is it time? [She pauses.] Yes, I got it cookin'. Some things bilin'. [But she does not get up. She merely sits, while he looks over the mail, opening a newspaper.] Sol, do you know what day this is?

MR. SYKES. Friday, ain't it?

MRS. SYKES. Oh, I don't mean that.

MR. SYKES. [examining the date line of the paper] Well, it's the ninth, then.

MRS. SYKES. Sol — Sol — have you fergot what day this is?

MR. SYKES. What's the matter? What do you mean?

MRS. SYKES. This is our weddin' anniversary!

MR. SYKES. Oh, that's what you mean. [Goes on reading the paper.]

MRS. SYKES. [wistfully] You didn't fergit, did you, Sol? [It dawns on her that he has forgotten, as he shows his lack of interest, his refuge in the newspaper. There is an air of futility, of helpless hopes, of resignation. She shakes her head, folds her hands, and rocks, as SOL stolidly resists any sentimental appeal.] Sol — Sol —

MR. SYKES. [somewhat petulantly] Well — well, what is it now?

MRS. SYKES. You ain't gonna buy a tractor, are you?

MR. SYKES. Mebbe.

MRS. SYKES. Instead of a 'lectric-lightin' plant?

MR. SYKES. Yes, mebbe I am.

MRS. SYKES. Oh, Sol, we don't need a tractor like as we need the 'lectric plant. We orta have more home comforts now, while we're livin'. We ain't gotta make more money. We got all we need. Jest for us two. The children's all taken care of.

MR. SYKES. Them new-fangled notions ain't to my likin'.

MRS. SYKES. A 'lectric plant's no more new-fangled than a tractor. And the tractor costs three times as much as the 'lectric plant, and won't bring us half as much comfort. We're gittin old, Sol. My heart is set on havin' some comforts before we pass on. We've — I can't go on this way — I jest can't. I ain't got the strength any more.

MR. SYKES. We could get the 'lectric plant *after* we git the tractor.

MRS. SYKES. It's allus *after*, allus *after*. Seems I've heard that all my life. Allus *after*. And *after* ain't come *yit*.

MR. SYKES. Well, I've ordered the tractor!

[*This is a terrific surprise, a bitter disappointment. It dashes the final hope to pieces. It recalls all its precedents. MRS. SYKES is moved beyond words.*]

MRS. SYKES. [chokingly] Sol — Sol —

[*He reads, knowing that he has ended his talk, secure in his brutality. MRS. SYKES walks into the house in a daze — reeling somewhat, as if faint. As she enters the kitchen, restrained,*

choking sobs are heard. Around the corner of the house appears REV. KERNS, the Red Bud pastor. He is a pompous, oratorical person of about thirty-five, though rather direct and businesslike.]

MR. KERNS. How'd do, Brother Sykes, how'd do?

MR. SYKES. Good mornin', Mr. Kerns.

MR. KERNS. I just met Sister Smithers — a fine woman, a real Christian soul. And Sister Smithers said [*unctuously*] that this was your wedding anniversary.

MR. SYKES. Yes, it is.

MR. KERNS. Well, that's fine. My congratulations, Brother Sykes, my congratulations. How many years is it now that you and Sister Sykes have been mated in the holy bonds of matrimony?

MR. SYKES. [*embarrassed, for he does not know*] Well, it's been a long time. Now let me see — you know I ain't good at figgers — let me see — my wife allus knows — well, I guess it's bin at least forty-five years. Or is it forty-four?

MR. KERNS. You have been an example to the community, Brother Sykes — you and Sister Sykes. We're proud of you. Yes, people look up to you. You have set a good example of how a man and wife should live. How satisfied you must feel, how — . . .

MR. SYKES. [*flattered*] Well, I allus believed in livin' accordin' to the Holy Writ. I —

MR. KERNS. If all our folks set an example like you —

MR. SYKES. I believe in old-fashioned religion and the Ten Commandments. I believe . . .

[*Unseen by the men, MRS. SYKES comes to the door, and overhears the conversation.*]

MR. KERNS. Yes, I know your beliefs, Mr. Sykes. But what I wanted to see you about this morning in particular — in addition to congratulating you — was

the improvements on the church. I came to you first of all the deacons, knowing that you'd set an example. Your share, according to your standing, is about five hundred dollars. And I know you'll want to give it, as a sort of anniversary offering.

MR. SYKES. Five hundred dollars! Ain't that purty steep?

MR. KERNS. No, not for *you*. Think how it will impress the others. It will make them liberal, too. [MRS. SYKES comes out into the yard, and to their notice.] Why, how'd do, Sister Sykes, congratulations! [She is pleased, looking at MR. SYKES, thinking he has told the minister.] Sister Smithers just told me. [MRS. SYKES is thoroughly disappointed.]

MRS. SYKES. Thanks!

MR. KERNS. Brother Sykes has just promised — or as well as promised — I mean he has practically agreed — to give the church five hundred dollars for the improvements. And I said this was a happy day to do it — sort of an anniversary offering.

MRS. SYKES. Sol, kin you afford it?

MR. SYKES. [*proudly*] Yes, I kin afford it. I'll do it. [*to the minister*] An' you make the others give, too. Let's make the church finer than ever. I believe in a house of worship as is a credit to the community. And I donate this five hundred dollars in honor of our weddin' anniversary. [*This afterthought he directs to his wife, expecting her to be thrilled by it and forget her other ideas. In his mind it justifies the selection of the tractor.*]

MR. KERNS. Oh, thank you, Brother Sykes. Thank you, Sister Sykes. It is a noble spirit. That is true love. How happy it must make you, Sister Sykes, to have such a fine husband — such a true mate. Thank you, thank you. I must spread the good news. I must

hasten to the others. Thank you again. And now, good-by, my friends. Good-by. You have done a good deed today. And God is with you. Good-by.

MR. SYKES. Good-by, Mr. Kerns. [*to MRS. SYKES, who has sunk into the chair*] Say "Good-by," Mary.

MRS. SYKES. [*sadly, monotonously*] Good-by, good-by.

[*MR. KERNS goes out.*]

MR. SYKES. Ain't you proud of my anniversary present, Mary?

MRS. SYKES. [*meditatively, but not in reply*] The five hundred dollars to the church — the thousand dollars for the tractor — nothin', nothin' for *me*. No, I ain't proud. I allus come *after* everything else. And I'm feared *after* is too late — too late. Every time I git robbed. Somethin' comes along and takes things away from me jest as I am gittin' ready for them.

MR. SYKES. [*disappointed and cranky*] I can't understand you, Mary. Are you still thinkin' about that 'lectric-lightin' plant and all the fixin's for the house? Might as well put it off'n your mind, fer we can't do all that this year. Mebbe next.

[*MRS. SYKES sits rocking nervously in her chair.*

She pulls her Bible out from underneath her apron. She acts as if she is about to read it. But indecision is in control. She looks helplessly about, even frantically. Her eyes wander crazily hither and thither. MR. SYKES, giving a gesture of "What's the use?" goes into the house. MRS. SYKES'S face twitches and her paleness seems to turn a gray-green. Some sun shaft or reflection silhouettes her shrunken face and faded hair in ghastly hideousness. Her slow rocking becomes faster, then diminishes. Slowly she crumples and shrinks in the chair, seeming to collapse. Sud-

denly there is a low, chuckling, fiendish gurgle, a silly laugh — a horrible, inarticulate, sputtering sound. As if electrocuted, her body stiffens, hurls itself up, spins around. A blood-curdling scream — that age-old announcement of departing reason. A penetrating, marrow-freezing scream, ending in the choking gurgle. She falls to her knees, then to her elbows. She beats the ground as she moans. Her thin hair falls over her scrawny neck.]

CURTAIN

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

E. P. CONKLE

E. P. Conkle is introduced to you as a typical young American playwright in the making. That he has already achieved something important is proved by the existence of the little play that follows these lines, and *Sparkin'* is only one of half a dozen Midwestern sketches every one of which bears the imprint of his original talent. Mr. Conkle has also tried his hand at the full-length play, though up to the present none of his long plays has yet been produced or published.

Ellsworth Prouty Conkle was born at Peru, Nebraska, in 1899. Until the age of fourteen or fifteen he lived in the town of his birth and then moved to a near-by farm, and for the next five years continued his schooling. Those years on the farm, he has told us, "planting, plowing, harvesting, brought me in daily contact with the earth and its farmers. I learned the ways of life — those simpler arts of hitching up a team, butchering a hog, pitching hay, cutting timber, mowing brush, hoeing corn, building fences, and the rest." In addition, he did carpentering work for his father, and would probably have become a carpenter if he had not instinctively felt that he wanted to do something else.

He therefore went to college and was graduated from the University of Nebraska; but long before that time he had tried his hand at writing. However, it was necessary for him to earn a living; and from the time of his graduation until now, he has been a teacher, except for two winters spent at Yale, where he studied playwrighting under Professor George P. Baker.

KATHLEEN NORRIS AND DAN TOTHEROH

Mrs. Norris belongs among our younger generation group not only because she has written a little play with Dan Totheroh, but because she is quite as young in her viewpoint as the youngest playwright now working. To make our record complete, however, it should be stated that Kathleen Norris was born in San Francisco in 1880, that she was privately educated until she entered the University of California, that she is married to the novelist Charles G. Norris, and that she began writing short stories in 1910.

She is, of course, well known as a novelist, but so far as it is possible to discover, her only attempt at drama is *The Kelly Kid*. As to her background and what prompted her to write her part of this play, she says:

"Of course, I have in my veins some of the Irish blood that shows in such stories as that of *The Kelly Kid* — having been named for no less pleasantly titled an ancestor than one Kathleen O'Keeffe, a great-grandmother, who used to live near Cork, had ten children, and also a London coat of such excellence that she deeded it to a favorite daughter in her will. Somehow that last detail, in our day of degraded fashion-chasing, suggests to me a dignified and poised and established country lady, whose costume was subjugated to her personality, and I like it better than anything else I know of her."

Dan Totheroh is also a Californian. Born in Oakland in 1894, he left his native city at the age of thirteen and went to live near San Rafael; there, while attending high school, he wrote his first play. It was a "sort of Pollyanna thing, and I had written the Pollyanna rôle for my sweetheart. Needless to say, I wrote the hero rôle for myself." On graduating, he acted in a San Francisco stock company, and later toured a small vaudeville circuit in a one-acter of his own composition.

He served in the American Army two years, and for one year was under fire in France. After his discharge he returned to America, determined to write plays. For a time he lived in New York writing for the magazines; and while sitting in

the Public Library to get warm, he wrote two one-acters, one of which was first published in the *Drama Magazine*. This was produced in California. Another, *In the Darkness*, won a prize in a national competition.

Like many another playwright, he at last made his way to Hollywood, where he acted for a while, but managed at the same time to write his best-known play, *Wild Birds*. It was first produced by Sam Hume at Berkeley and later in New York. When it was done in San Francisco, the police tried to censor it.

Mr. Totheroh's next step was to become a member of Mr. Hume's producing staff at the University of California, but in 1924 he again went to New York, with high hopes and several new plays. Though some of these were contracted for, only one was produced — *The Orchard*, by Stuart Walker in Cincinnati.

"Becoming discouraged," he says, "by the attitude of the average Broadway producer, I took to fiction and have produced three novels in the last three years . . . You see, I had to be sure of some sort of steady income; but plays are not forgotten, and I work off and on at three or four pets of mine which I hope to see done some day. And now I'm in the movies, writing dialogue for the new talkie craze, but I'm trying at the same time to be true to myself. I wonder how long I can hold out?"

LYNN RIGGS

The author of *Knives From Syria* has managed to pack a good deal of experience into his thirty years. He was born on a farm near Claremore, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), in 1899. At the age of six he moved into town and attended school; but during vacation terms he lived on a farm, rode after cattle with his father and brother, and in his spare moments did a good deal of reading — most of it trash. "Read a lot," he says, "Old Sleuth, Diamond Dick, Horatio Alger."

Mr. Riggs's autobiography is succinct and picturesque, so let us have him tell in his own words most of what remains to be recorded:

"My first paid job — driving an old horse to a grocery store delivery wagon; worked in glass factories at Salpula one summer. Went to country play parties, box suppers, pie suppers, Friday 'Speakings,' auctions. Sang in the spotlight of a movie house." In 1917 he graduated from high school and "rode a caboose of a cattle train to Chicago," where he worked for the Adams Express Company. A few months later he went to New York, where he remained nearly two years. There (in Astoria and the Bronx) he played as an extra in "Western" movies, sold books at Macy's, and read proof for the *Wall Street Journal*. In 1919 he returned home, "a wreck," he says, and that summer worked at Tulsa for the *Oil and Gas Journal*. It was there he "discovered poetry, read all the modern poetry, and wrote my first poems. Reams and reams. Very bad. In the fall I went to Los Angeles, played extra in many movies. . . . Read proof for the Los Angeles *Times* and nearly ruined my eyes."

In 1920 he returned once again to Claremore. "Summer there, a wreck again. Entered University of Oklahoma in the fall at Norman. Never missed a dance or a football game. Wrote more poetry. Messrs. Mencken and Nathan began to print me in *The Smart Set*. . . . Taught freshman English after my first year. Christmas vacation, 1921, wrote a wild farce, *Cuckoo*, which was hilariously produced. Summer of 1922, on chataqua all over the Middle West. The Southern Minstrels. I was second tenor in the quartet.

"November, complete nervous collapse. . . . Went to Santa Fé and worked on a ranch. Recovered. Went to work for Spanish and Indian Trading Company. Won Oklahoma poetry prize for two sonnets. Went all over New Mexico, to Mexican and Indian villages . . . Wrote long poem which appeared in the *Nation*. Published many poems in *Poetry*, etc."

In 1925 he made what he called a "bantering bargain" to write a play for production by the Santa Fé Players. This was *Knives From Syria*, which was directed by Ida Rauh, one of the original Provincetown Players. It was also at Santa Fé that he wrote his first long play, *The Primitives*.

Before leaving Santa Fé he wrote *Sump'n Like Wings*.

Then he went to Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, teaching English at a night school in that city. *Big Lake* was written in Oak Park.

Early in February of 1926, Mr. Riggs received a letter from Kenneth Macgowan to whom he had sent *Sump'n Like Wings*. "Went to New York, and Mr. Macgowan for the Actors' Theatre contracted for '*Sump'n*.' Wrote *A Lantern to See By*." And that summer he spent on Hatcher Hughes's farm near New York, "making hay, plowing, hauling rye, making roads, etc., including writing a new play, *The High Mountain*. Appalled at how bad it was. . . . Came back to New York. Wrote many poems."

His first New York production was at the American Laboratory Theater, in April, 1927 — *Big Lake*. It attracted little attention and ran only for a few weeks, but was published in book form late that summer.

Mr. Riggs was meantime earning a slender living in a book store. During the summer which he spent at "Yaddo," Saratoga Springs, he wrote *The Lonesome West*, and later in the year, *Rancor*, which was produced by Jasper Deeter at the Hedgerow Theater at Moylan-Rose Valley, Pennsylvania, the following spring.

In 1928 he wrote *The Domino Parlor*, which was tried out in Newark by the Shuberts for a week. Early in the summer he won a Guggenheim Fellowship for "unusual and proved creative ability in drama," and spent nearly a year abroad, where he wrote his latest play, *Green Grow the Lilacs*.

Lynn Riggs's plays are characteristically American, genuine and moving transcripts of Oklahoma life. He has, to quote the preface to *Big Lake*, "taken the folk-material and the idiom of his native district and skillfully made of them a rich medium of expression. . . . He has reproduced the subtle rhythms of everyday speech."

EUGENE O'NEILL

Here ¹ is a compact autobiography by Mr. O'Neill written in 1919 in reply to a request for something about himself:

¹ Quoted from *Eugene O'Neill, The Man and his Plays*, by Barrett H. Clark. McBride, 1929.

“As for data relative to myself, it is a privilege to give you anything you might think of interest. I am inexperienced in this matter, however, and you must pardon me if what I am sending proves unsuitable. But it seems to me that a bare outline of my experiences preceding any attempt — or, in truth, desire — to write might be interesting as revealing the background of real life behind my work, and as proving that I have not written out of the top of my head.

“I am thirty. My undergraduate college education was confined to a freshman year at Princeton University, class of 1910. My first job was secretary of a mail order firm in New York. In 1909 I went with a mining engineer on a gold prospecting trip to Spanish Honduras, Central America. At the end of six months I was invalided home — tropical malarial fever — no gold. After that I became assistant manager of a theatrical company touring the East and Middle West. My first voyage to sea followed — sixty-five days on a Norwegian barque, Boston to Buenos Aires. In Argentine I worked at various occupations — in the draughting department of the Westinghouse Electrical Company, in the wool house of a packing plant at La Plata, in the office of the Singer Sewing Machine Company in Buenos Aires. Followed another voyage at sea, tending mules in a cattle steamer, Buenos Aires to Durban [South] Africa, and return. After that a lengthy period of complete destitution in Buenos Aires — ‘on the beach’ — terminated by my signing on as ordinary seaman on a British tramp steamer bound home for New York. My final experience at sea followed soon after this — able seaman on the American Line, New York to Southampton. The next winter I played a part in my father’s vaudeville version of *Monte Cristo*, touring the Far West. Then I worked as reporter on the New London, Connecticut, *Telegraph*. My health broke down, my lungs being affected, and I spent six months in a sanatorium thinking it over. It was in this enforced period of reflection that the urge to write first came to me. The next fall — I was twenty-four — I began my first play — *The Web*. In 1914–1915 I was a student in Professor Baker’s English 47 at Harvard. The summer of 1916 I spent

at Provincetown. It was during that summer the Provincetown Players, who have made the original productions of nearly all my short plays in New York, were first organized."

Since this was written, Eugene O'Neill has come into his own, not only as the most distinguished playwright America has ever produced, but one of the greatest of living dramatists.

His first long play, *Beyond the Horizon*, appeared in 1920, and from that time on over fifteen plays of his have been produced.

His earliest efforts were one-acters, of which he wrote more than thirty, though many of these were never acted or printed. Though he later (in 1924) declared that he was no longer interested in the one-act form, he was enabled, while experimenting for the Provincetown Players, to bring it to a point of perfection, in *Ile* and *The Moon of the Caribbees*, that has been equalled only by the best one-acters of Paul Green. Mr. O'Neill, in considering what he had been able to achieve in his 'prentice years, said that "the one-act play, however, is a fine vehicle for something poetical, for something spiritual in feeling that cannot be carried through a long play."

J. W. ROGERS

John William Rogers Jr. was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1894, and while his winters were spent in his native state, the summers he passed in the district south of Nashville, Tennessee. "Texas was home," he says, and "Tennessee an event. I find that the excitement which accompanied my visits so sharpened impressions in my mind that it is to the Tennessee memories I have turned mostly in the plays I have written."

From Texas he went to Dartmouth College, where his interest in the theater was stimulated by the activities of the Dramatic Association, at that time under the direction of Walter Wanger. It was at Dartmouth that Mr. Rogers's first attempt at playwriting was produced. This was called *The Blood Dark*, and is, Mr. Rogers believes, the first acted play in which no character appears on the stage.

After graduation, Mr. Rogers went to New York; then followed eighteen months in the army during the War, a

period Mr. Rogers looks back on as "singularly remote from me and futile, in spite of the large number of vivid pictures of the time that remain."

Some time was then spent with *Scribner's* as their book advertising manager; after that came a year in Europe. "I returned to Texas," he says, "where eventually I fell into newspaper work as the nearest thing that the life of the community offered to a self-supporting career of letters. . . ." He then returned again to New York and was "one of the people who helped the Literary Guild to get started on its successful career."

He is at present living in Texas.

J. W. Rogers's work in drama has been limited so far to one-act plays. His best-known is *Judge Lynch*, with which the Dallas Little Theater, directed by Oliver Hinsdell, won the Belasco Trophy in 1924, in Mr. Hartwig's National Little Theater Tournament. This was followed by *Saved*, *Mary Means What She Says*, *Wedding Presents*, *Bumblepuppy*, and *Women Folks*.

Mr. Rogers's plays are not only skillful stage pieces; they are well-drawn pictures of Southern life. The author of *Saved* states that "nothing has fascinated me more than the power that can grow out of the forced economy of material that is inevitable in the technique of the drama. The limited physical endurance of audiences, together with the heightened emotional tension which must exist from the rise to the fall of the curtain, demands that the dramatist shall strike directly at the heart of his subject, and never wander."

JOHN D. SHAVER

Mr. Shaver's history is short and uneventful. Born July 7, 1899, in the Middle West, of which he writes, he has lived and taught school in various districts of northwestern Missouri.

As one of a group of students at the Northeast Missouri State Teachers' College at Kirksville who took a particular interest in drama and play production, he wrote *The Resignation of Bill Snyder* while studying playwriting under

Professor C. M. Wise, until recently head of the Department of Speech at the Teachers' College. Since writing this play, Mr. Shaver has received his master's degree at the University of Iowa and is now in charge of dramatic production at the Kirksville State Teachers' College.

Of the actual background of *The Resignation of Bill Snyder*, Mr. Shaver writes:

"It is probably the little town of McFall in northeast Missouri, where the author once lived, and where the original of Bill Snyder once carried the mail on route three for nearly a score of years. This section of the state is a pleasant land in summer, and ordinarily the winters are mild enough; but lying just to the east of the great plains, with no protection from their wintry blasts, it is occasionally swept by fierce blizzards from the Northwest that bring down the intense cold and the great snows of the northern mountains and plains."

PAUL GREEN

Paul Green makes his living by teaching at a university. Mr. Green's subject is philosophy. He has been a member of the faculty of the University of North Carolina for the past few years.

His biography is interesting chiefly because it suggests a good deal about his background. When some day it becomes necessary to write it out in detail, much of it will have to be based on his writings, where he has recorded his impressions of life in terms of character; for his passion as a writer is expressed in showing and interpreting the thoughts and action and speech of the Blacks and Whites among whom nearly all his life has been spent.

More than two years ago, he submitted the following biographical outline, which is characteristically modest:

"Born on a farm near Lillington, North Carolina, March 17, 1894. Farmed in the spring and summer and went to school a few months in the winter. Later went to Buie's Creek Academy, from which he was graduated in 1914. Taught a country school two years. Entered the University of North Carolina in 1916. Enlisted in the army in 1917.

Served as private, corporal, sergeant-major with the 105th Engineers, Thirtieth Division. Later as second lieutenant at Paris. Served four months on the Western Front. Returned to the University of North Carolina in 1919. Was graduated from there in 1921. Did graduate work at his alma mater and at Cornell University. At present is a member of the faculty at the University of North Carolina."

Since this was written, Mr. Green has had two full-length plays professionally produced, *In Abraham's Bosom*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1927, and *The Field God*.

He has published (besides four volumes of plays) a remarkable collection of short stories and sketches under the title of *Wide Fields*.

Paul Green is another of our younger native writers who has sought to interpret the life and scenes that have been familiar to him. He has felt, to a greater degree I think than any other recent native writer, the appeal of all we mean by the word "soil." "Even now," he writes, "when I go down home among my folks, Negroes and Whites, I feel a definite loss in that they, too, don't always view me as one of the tribe of Benjamin. . . . I can't help feeling that they are experiencing life that no art can compass . . . There among them I felt at home as I'll never feel at home elsewhere. The smell of their sweaty bodies, the gusto of their indecent jokes, the knowledge of their twisted philosophies, the sight of their feet entangled among the pea vines and grass, their shouts, groans and bellyachings, the sun blistering down upon them and the rim of the sky enclosing them forever, all took me wholly, and I was one of them — neither black nor white, but one of them, children of the moist earth underfoot."

The man who can feel that way about people and things has it in him to write sympathetically and passionately, and this is exactly what Paul Green has done. He has already given us nearly thirty one-act plays, and four long ones. To understand and appreciate his rare gifts you should read *In Abraham's Bosom*, among the full-length plays, and at least two or three of his tragic one-acters, in addition to *The No 'Count Boy*.

KENYON NICHOLSON
AND
G. EDWARD PENDRAY

J. Kenyon Nicholson's greatest success in the theater was *The Barker*, a remarkably vivid picture of carnival life in the Middle West. Though he was born at Crawfordsville, Indiana (in 1894, to be precise), he has travelled extensively and written plays on a wide variety of subjects.

After graduating from Wabash College he did post-graduate work at Columbia University and at Cambridge, England. In 1917 he enlisted in the army and served with the A. E. F., First Army Headquarters Regiment, for eighteen months. After his discharge he returned to New York, where he was associated with Stuart Walker's repertory companies as publicity agent and play reader.

In 1922 he became a member of the faculty of Columbia University, where he conducted playwrighting classes. During the past two years he has devoted most of his time to the writing of his own plays.

Mr. Nicholson's five earliest plays were one-acters, all of which were first published in the *Smart Set*.

One of his earliest long plays, *Honor Bright*, was produced by Stuart Walker in Indianapolis. This was written in collaboration with Meredith Nicholson. A number of other long plays were written after this, several of them the result of collaboration. Of these, two have reached Broadway: *Love Is Like That* (written with S. N. Behrman), and *Eva The Fifth* (written with John Golden).

The Barker, his most characteristic product, was first played in 1927. His latest full-length play is *Before You're 25*, produced in New York in the spring of 1929.

Mr. Nicholson, while putting into the full-length form his most interesting material, still believes that the one-act play is a distinct art form. Of his twenty-odd one-acters, *The Organ* is probably the most clear-cut example of a rural play of native types.

G. Edward Pendray, who collaborated with Mr. Nicholson

in the writing of *The Organ*, was born at Omaha in 1901. At the age of seven his parents took him to a homestead near the border line between Wyoming and Nebraska. "A Sears-Roebuck Catalog and a set of Shakespeare," he says, "was our library. I went to a country school three miles away, and in 1914 entered a missionary academy." After studying for a while at the University of Wyoming, he taught in a homestead school, returning to complete his studies and graduate, which he did in 1924. Coming East, he took a master's degree at Columbia University the next year. It was at that time that he began writing one-act plays and joined the staff of the New York *Herald-Tribune*.

RACHEL FIELD

It was inevitable that the author of Rachel Field's stories and verse and plays should be born in Massachusetts, and Stockbridge seems exactly the right town. Here she was born in 1893 and received her early education. Before she left home she had been taken to see her first play. It was not surprising to learn that this was *Peter Pan*. Her interest in plays, however, had already been aroused by the amateur shows she had seen and acted in at Miss Brewer's School in Stockbridge.

She left home to enter Radcliffe College, and while there she studied playwrighting in Professor Baker's English 47 class, which produced several of her early one-acters. On leaving college she went to New York, with the partly finished ms of a book of verse and enough plays to fill a volume. From that day to this, Miss Field spends her winters in New York and her summers in New England.

Besides her dozen or fifteen one-act plays, she has written several volumes of verse and some delightful children's books, most of them with her own illustrations.

MICHAEL GOLD

"Mike" Gold, as he is known to his friends, was born in New York City in 1896, of Jewish immigrant parents. At the age of thirteen he went to work in a factory, and during

the next few years he was in turn a porter, a section-gang laborer, an express company driver, and office worker. For six years he was on the staff of various newspapers, in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Mexico City, and elsewhere. In his own words, he has for some time "been active in many strikes and other seditious activities; published a life of John Brown . . . (my favorite American hero), also a book of short stories of workers' life in America, called *120 Million* . . . was codirector of the New Playwrights' Theater, has one negro fantasy, *Hoboken Blues*, produced there." The Provincetown Players have just contracted for his full-length play, *Fiesta*.

BABETTE HUGHES

Babette Hughes was born in 1905, at Seattle, Washington. She attended private and public schools in Seattle and in Washington, D. C., and the University of Washington, Seattle. At the university she specialized in literature and took courses in creative writing. Her first published plays and poems appeared in collections of undergraduate work edited by Glenn Hughes, whom she married in 1924.

She writes because she enjoys it. She has no "message" of a sociological or philosophical sort, and she makes no pretence at profundity. She is interested in people as personalities, and her observation of them is always attended by a lively sense of humor. It is this which keeps her writing from ever becoming too sentimental and which inclines her toward characters of eccentric or at least whimsical natures. She is fond, she tells us, of "repartee and lively situations," and she has an instinct "for the theatrical, whether real or imaginary." She abhors pathos and avoids tragedy. Her aim as a writer is to achieve style — that is, mastery of expression — and thus to communicate to others her own keen enjoyment of the "human comedy."

MARK O'DEA

Mark O'Dea was born in 1888 in the Corn Belt region of Illinois, at Mattoon, of Revolutionary farmer stock which had pushed out from Massachusetts to the Midwest. As a young

man Mr. O'Dea chose Montana as his frontier, but returned to the land of his forefathers to a farm in Westchester County, where he now resides.

A few years ago he made a national investigation of the mechanization of rural life, visiting hundreds of farms in ten Midwestern states. From the knowledge thus gained, Mr. O'Dea has written, in the form of short stories and one-act plays, numerous interpretations of a typical community which he calls "Red Bud," and its countryside.

In *The Song of Solomon* we have one phase of country life in its relation to rural modernization. "The patience of the farm woman," says Mr. O'Dea, "particularly the pioneer, is poignantly impressive. By contrast, one often finds — too often — man's eternal selfishness and, in his mastery of soil and nature, a hesitancy to recognize the tremendous part enacted by women. Thanks to progress, adjustments are taking place and inequalities are being overcome, so that the type of domestic conflict presented in *The Song of Solomon* is more of the past than of the future."

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

SPARKIN'

1. Draw a diagram of the stage set for the presentation of this play. Indicate the relative position of the four characters after Orry has entered and seated himself. 2. Wherein lies the value of the play? 3. To what day and generation do the characters belong? 4. Do you believe that Granny as a type has been exaggerated? 5. What is an outstanding example of humor? 6. Is it what the characters say, or what they do, that most amuses the audience? 7. Tell what has taken place just before the curtain rises. 8. Do you believe that Lessie is expecting Orry to call this evening? 9. Is it typical of Granny to monopolize the conversation? 10. Describe Orry as you would have him appear at the time of his entrance.

11. In costume and action what must be carefully avoided if the play is to be effectively produced? 12. Why does Granny select this particular night to sit up so late? 13. What is the point to Orry's continual reference to the darkness outside every time he opens the door to spit? 14. Is it possible to suppose Orry's very bad mistake of spitting into the closet will ultimately react in his favor? Explain. 15. As a matter of fact, why didn't Lessie tell Orry of his mistake at the time? 16. Is Granny as angry as she pretends to be over the soiled dress? 17. How do you account for her sudden change of heart? 18. Is the last speech in accordance with the general atmosphere of the play? 19. Suggest one word that sums up the character of Granny. 20. How does the dialect as used add to the effectiveness of the play?

21. It is evident that the author of this play has presented a bit of real life. Do you consider that any topic representing a phase of actual life makes good drama?

THE KELLY KID

1. Compare the attitudes of the three women toward the Kelly Kid at the beginning and at the ending of the play. 2. How do you account for the change which takes place in the minds of the women? 3. In this play what first catches your interest? Why? 4. When does it first become apparent that the ladies

are going to champion the cause of the Kelly Kid? 5. What impulses prompted the women to shield Robby Kelly? 6. Describe Ellen's plan to frustrate Officer Hamilton. 7. Upon what does the success of the plan depend? 8. Should the audience be deceived as is Officer Hamilton? 9. Why is Officer Burns necessary to the play? 10. Is it your belief that the Kelly Kid is really bad?

11. Would it have been better for Robby had the women allowed the law to take its course? 12. Which holds your interest more, the plot or the characters? 13. What particular lines and action would be most effective in the presentation of the play? 14. Which characters would be most appreciated? Why? 15. Why would you call this a good play? 16. Suppose Robby comes to visit Mrs. Murphy at Christmas time. Use this setting and the same characters, and write a bit of the conversation.

KNIVES FROM SYRIA

1. Where does the dramatist reveal the necessary information regarding the events which have preceded the opening of the play? 2. What twofold purpose is served by the letter? 3. For what primary reason does Mrs. Buster desire her daughter to marry Charlie? 4. What light does Mrs. Buster's strong faith in the Bible throw upon her character? 5. What is the first dramatic moment in the play? 6. When does it become evident that Mrs. Buster and Charlie are more interested in each other than are Rhodie and Charlie? 7. Mrs. Buster's conversation with Rhodie on the subject of love has what bearing on later developments? 8. Give a brief description of the Syrian peddler. 9. What response does the peddler arouse in the audience upon his appearance? 10. What allure does the peddler hold for Rhodie?

11. Compare the attraction of Rhodie for the peddler with that of Pheelie for the No 'Count Boy. 12. Explain in what manner suspicion is cast upon the peddler. 13. Did you share Mrs. Buster's conviction that it was the Syrian who attacked Charlie? 14. Why does Rhodie's mother suddenly give her consent to the marriage? 15. At what point does the suspense reach its greatest height? 16. Why does the title of the play seem appropriate? 17. Paul Green, the author of *The No 'Count Boy*, allowed Pheelie's dream to be wrecked. What elements in the structure of *Knives from Syria* make it more logical not to wreck Rhodie's dream of future happiness?

ILE

1. What do you consider is the real problem (or point at issue) in this play? 2. Describe the room in which the action takes place. 3. What is the purpose of the dialogue between Ben and the Steward at the beginning of the play? 4. Why doesn't Captain Keeney allow his wife to go on deck? 5. Why does the Captain refuse to turn back? 6. Are you in sympathy with his determination to continue the trip? 7. Explain how the Captain and his mate prevent a mutiny. 8. To what extent is Annie successful in persuading her husband to return home? 9. At what point in the play does your interest reach the greatest height? 10. What are your final impressions after reading the play?

11. What is the date at the time this play takes place? 12. Where is the geographical setting? 13. The subject of whaling is interesting. Be prepared to make a short report to the class on this topic. Why did the industry cease? 14. Describe the town of Homeport as you picture it. 15. Write the dialogue as you imagine it in which Annie persuades her husband to allow her to accompany him on this expedition? 16. How would you characterize Captain Keeney? 17. To what extent is the character Annie necessary to the play? 18. Read Rachel Field's play *Greasy Luck*, and compare it with *Ile*. 19. Would you have *Ile* end differently? Explain.

SAVED

1. What does the opening speech accomplish? 2. Note the method the playwright uses to disclose to the audience that Mrs. Saunders is the minister's wife; that Miss Sue teaches school, etc. What greater problem confronts the dramatist in this respect than confronts the story writer or novelist? 3. Explain Mrs. Saunders' attitude on missionary work. Do you agree with Mrs. Bostick when she says that the minister's wife has imagination? 4. What is the purpose of the early reference to the love affair between Miss Emily and Frank Ellis? 5. While tea is being served what lines or "business" bring out Miss Minnie's disposition? 6. What are the dominant traits of character found in Miss Minnie? 7. As the women first discuss Carter Oakes what are your impressions of him? 8. Does your opinion of him change as the play goes on? 9. Do you think Mrs. Saunders knew for whom the note which she found was in-

tended? 10. What do you think Mrs. Saunders should have done with the note?

11. Can Miss Minnie be justified for making an effort to ruin the plans of Sue and Carter Oakes? 12. Do you believe Miss Emily regrets that she has been prevented from marrying Frank Ellis? 13. What is your version as to the meaning of the title? 14. Do you think the same title would have been appropriate had Miss Minnie succeeded in preventing Sue's marrying Carter Oakes? 15. As the play nears an end, how is suspense maintained? 16. Describe the next meeting of the King's Daughters. Keep the same characters and write a few lines of their conversation. 17. Are the characters in this play really true to life? 18. In what part of the United States is the setting for this play? What is the reason for your answer?

THE RESIGNATION OF BILL SYNDER

1. What two urgent reasons make it necessary to find a carrier for Route 3? 2. Explain why Anderson is so interested in having his advertising circulars go out on this particular day. 3. To what extent is Bill Snyder's personal record a matter of significance? 4. What purpose does Ralph's ignorance of Bill Snyder's resignation serve the author? 5. How is the character of each of the men who refuse the carrier's position brought out? 6. If after the storm it should become necessary to offer the position to one of the three applicants, which one should you select? Why? 7. Does the dramatist show good knowledge of men? 8. Is Bill Snyder as a character well presented? Note what the author says about him in the biographical sketch. 9. What commendable traits does he possess? 10. Do you feel that the ending of the play was a surprise or inevitable?

11. Can you think of another character that could be introduced during the play? Write his lines. 12. With which character, as a type, are you most familiar? 13. Do you feel that any one character is more true to life than another? 14. Tell the story of the play in as few words as possible. 15. Write an advance review of the "Resignation of Bill Snyder" to use in the school or local paper for the purpose of advertising the play. 16. Dramatize some imaginary experience of Bill Snyder's career as a rural free delivery driver.

THE NO 'COUNT BOY

1. What is responsible for the mood in which we find Pheelie upon the arrival of Enos? 2. How does Enos explain his early

arrival? 3. Does the No 'Count Boy deliberately arouse the anger of Enos? If so, why? 4. What is to be gained by having the boy sing and recite instead of just telling Pheelie of the wonders of the great world? 5. Is it natural for Pheelie to be attracted to the No 'Count Boy? Why? 6. Are the changes in emotion which Pheelie undergoes toward Enos and the boy natural? 7. Why do you suppose the dramatist allows Pheelie's dream to be wrecked? 8. How would you characterize Enos? 9. Do you feel that he has qualities which make for success? 10. Write a character sketch of the No 'Count Boy.

11. Do you think the author has used dialect effectively? 12. What does the dialect add to the reading or acting of the play? 13. In what ways does the dialect differ from that used by modern writers of negro fiction? Give an example. 14. As the play goes on which persons arouse your interest to the greatest extent? Your sympathies? 15. What is responsible for Pheelie's revolt against her environment? 16. Who is made to appear in the more favorable light; the romantic Pheelie or the practical Enos? 17. What does the author bring to this simple situation that makes a drama of such merit? 18. Write a review of this play in about two hundred words, favorable or unfavorable.

THE ORGAN

1. What factors contribute to the drab atmosphere discovered as the curtain rises? 2. Is such a situation as is here presented common among homesteaders? Why? 3. How does the dramatist arouse our sympathies for Mrs. Peterson? 4. Why is it the organ Myra wishes to save rather than any other of her household goods? 5. As the play goes on what strengthens her desire? 6. Point out certain lines which convey Henry's sense of defeat. 7. What characteristics present in these people show them to be typical homesteaders? 8. How does Mrs. Jasper immediately arouse our antagonism? 9. Do you feel that the character of the auctioneer is authentic? Why? 10. Does Myra in your opinion take the right attitude while endeavoring to prevent the sale of the organ?

11. Is her action justifiable? Explain. 12. Describe the effect upon those who hear her. 13. Why is it necessary to sell the organ in spite of Myra's protest? 14. When do you think Cal Jasper makes up his mind to give the organ to Myra? 15. Do you think he was influenced more by Myra's plea than by the scorn of his neighbors? 16. What must be Mrs. Jasper's stage

business while her husband is being rebuked? 17. Do you feel that the major characters in the play are well named? Explain. 18. Prepare a short report on the subject "Homesteading."

"BARGAINS IN CATHAY"

1. Through use of daffodils, what note does the author immediately strike? 2. How do the daffodils assist you in understanding Emily's mood? 3. What use does the dramatist make of Jerry? 4. Why is Miss Doty presented in a disagreeable light? 5. For what reason is Miss Emily so thrilled by the arrival of the books of poems? 6. Do you feel that Thompson Williams is much of a poet? 7. By means of what arrangement has his book been published? 8. What has been Emily's contribution to the book? 9. Is the ability of Emily as a saleswoman well established? 10. With which of her first two customers does Emily show greater tact?

11. To what in the natures of Miss Bliss and Mr. Royce does she appeal? 12. Which of the two sales to you seems more real? 13. What difficulty faces Thompson Williams in his desire to become a poet? 14. What is responsible for the impression Emily has made on Mr. Williams Sr.? 15. Consider the various entrances and determine why each is natural. 16. Point out two examples of subtle humor. 17. Have you enjoyed reading this play? 18. Write a short letter to the superintendent of schools telling him something about *Bargains in Cathay* and inviting him to witness a production of the play by your class. 19. Write the dialogue between Emily and Miss Doty after the departure of Mr. Williams Sr.

MONEY

1. When is suspicion first cast upon Yonkel? 2. Once you suspect Yonkel has taken the money, do you retain your suspicion until he confesses? 3. What does Moisha mean by calling his money his wife and child? 4. What is most responsible in causing Yonkel to confess? 5. Is Yonkel convincing in explaining why he could not bring himself to return the money? 6. What theory does Yonkel advance regarding the influence of money on society? 7. What is your opinion concerning this theory? 8. What is the application of Yonkel's story about the snake and the rabbi? 9. Yonkel believes that God is responsible for the louse which He has created. Wherein lies the strength or weakness as Yonkel applies it to himself? 10. What is your answer

to Yonkel's question, "Can a man always conquer the beast within himself"?

11. As the play goes on, do you believe that Yonkel has at last conquered this beast? 12. Should Yonkel have been turned over to the policeman? Why wasn't he? 13. What marked characteristics do you discover in these immigrants? 14. Note that the author has his characters speak in good English rather than in dialect. Why is the play so written? 15. Would the use of Jewish dialect have added to the effect of the play? 16. Has the play solved a problem or presented one? 17. Why do you think *Money* is a desirable play to include in this collection? 18. What steps are being taken by the United States to eliminate such conditions as are depicted in this play?

BACKSTAGE

1. Is it primarily plot, character, setting, or dialogue that makes this play interesting? 2. What has the author established in the opening scene? 3. How is the use of slang justifiable in the play? 4. In what capacity does Carlos serve the troupe? 5. Is this character well portrayed? Explain. 6. What leads him to desert the show? 7. What bearing has his departure on the reception accorded Jon and Tony? 8. What brought the mayor backstage? 9. What apparently is his state of mind at the opening of the interview with Miss Russell? 10. Why does Mayor Richards decide to close the show?

11. What later developments cause him to change his mind? 12. Are his actions ethical? 13. Why does Ann decide to take Tony into her company? 14. How does the return of Carlos simplify the situation from Ann's point of view? 15. Show that Ann has managed her affairs wisely. 16. Is it your opinion that this play will be effective when produced? 17. Make a poster which may be used to advertise *Backstage*. 18. How would you describe the play?

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

1. What facts important to the play are brought out in the early conversation of Mrs. Smithers and Mrs. Bamberger? 2. What is Solomon's standing in the community? 3. How has he gained this position? 4. To what extent has Mrs. Sykes assisted her husband to achieve success? 5. What has it meant to her to be the wife of Solomon Sykes? 6. What seems to be the thought in the minds of the two visitors upon the appearance of

Mrs. Sykes? 7. What causes Mrs. Sykes's embarrassment as she discovers her callers? 8. Mrs. Bamberger seeks to accomplish what by saying, "If you'd read your Bible like Mis' Sykes, you'd be better off"? 9. As the conversation now goes on explain the respective attitudes of each of the two women towards Mrs. Sykes. 10. Why does Mrs. Sykes attempt to explain her reading of *The Song of Solomon*?

11. Why does Mrs. Sykes cling to the memory of a long past romance? 12. Pick out lines that show her mind to be affected. Are we prepared for what happens at the very end of the play? 13. What purpose has Mrs. Smithers served as a character in this play? 14. Is Solomon Sykes purposely unkind to his wife? 15. Can his attitude in buying a tractor in preference to an electric plant be defended? 16. Discuss the statement: "Farm first, household comforts second," as it applies to farm life in general. 17. What sudden impulse prompted Solomon to make a gift of five hundred dollars to the church? 18. Does any good intent underlie his gift? 19. Point out the particular events during the play that lead to Mrs. Sykes's mental collapse. 20. If you were playing Solomon's part, what traits of his character should you seek to emphasize?

21. Does this play seem better suited for reading and study than for stage presentation? Why? 22. What similarity do you find between this play and *The No 'Count Boy*? 23. What purpose had the author in mind while writing this play? 24. Has a new or different field in literature been revealed to you while reading *The Song of Solomon*?

